LECTURES

ON

RHETORIC

AND

BELLES LETTRES.

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CONTENTS

OF THE

THIRD VOLUME.

LECT.		Page
XXXV.	*COMPARATIVE Merit of the Antients and the Moderns—Hiſtorical Writing.*	1
XXXVI.	*Hiſtorical Writing.* -	28
XXXVII.	*Philoſophical Writing — Dialogue—Epiſtolary Writing—Fictitious Hiſtory.* -	57
XXXVIII.	*Nature of Poetry—Its Origin and Progreſs—Verſification.*	84
XXXIX.	*Paſtoral Poetry—Lyric Poetry.*	114
XL.	*Didactic Poetry — Deſcriptive Poetry.* - -	146
XLI.	*The Poetry of the Hebrews.*	175
XLII.	*Epic Poetry.* - - - -	203
XLIII.	*Homer's Iliad and Odyſſey—Virgil's Æneid.* - -	230

XLIV.

LECT. Page

XLIV. *Lucan's Pharſalia—Taſſo's Jeruſalem—Camoen's Luſiad—Fenelon's Telemachus — Voltaire's Henriade — Milton's Paradiſe Loſt.* - 259

XLV. *Dramatic Poetry—Tragedy.* 291

XLVI. *Tragedy — Greek — French—Engliſh Tragedy.* - 323

XLVII. *Comedy — Greek and Roman—French—Engliſh Comedy.* 355

LECTURE XXXV.

COMPARATIVE MERIT OF THE ANTIENTS AND THE MODERNS—HISTORICAL WRITING.

LECT. XXXV.

I HAVE now finiſhed that part of the Courſe which reſpected Oratory or Public Speaking, and which, as far as the ſubject allowed, I have endeavoured to form into ſome ſort of ſyſtem. It remains, that I enter on the conſideration of the moſt diſtinguiſhed kinds of Compoſition both in Proſe and Verſe, and point out the principles of Criticiſm relating to them. This part of the work might eaſily be drawn out to a great length; but I am ſenſible, that critical diſcuſſions, when they are purſued too far, become both trifling and tedious. I ſhall ſtudy, therefore, to avoid unneceſſary prolixity; and hope, at the ſame time, to omit nothing that is very material under the ſeveral heads.

I SHALL follow the ſame method here which I have all along purſued, and without which,

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LECT. XXXV.

theſe Lectures could not be entitled to any attention; that is, I ſhall freely deliver my own opinion on every ſubject; regarding authority no farther, than as it appears to me founded on good ſenſe and reaſon. In former Lectures, as I have often quoted ſeveral of the antient claſſics for their beauties, ſo I have alſo, ſometimes, pointed out their defects. Hereafter, I ſhall have occaſion to do the ſame, when treating of their writings under more general heads. It may be fit, therefore, that, before I proceed farther, I make ſome obſervations on the comparative merit of the Antients and the Moderns; in order that we may be able to aſcertain rationally, upon what foundation that deference reſts, which has ſo generally been paid to the Antients. Theſe obſervations are the more neceſſary, as this ſubject has given riſe to no ſmall controverſy in the Republic of Letters; and they may, with propriety, be made now, as they will ſerve to throw light on ſome things I have afterwards to deliver, concerning different kinds of Compoſition.

It is a remarkable phænomenon, and one which has often employed the ſpeculations of curious men, that Writers and Artiſts, moſt diſtinguiſhed for their parts and genius, have generally appeared in conſiderable numbers at a time. Some ages have been remarkably barren

LECT. XXXV.

barren in them; while, at other periods, Nature ſeems to have exerted herſelf with a more than ordinary effort, and to have poured them forth with a profuſe fertility. Various reaſons have been aſſigned for this. Some of the moral cauſes lie obvious; ſuch as favourable circumſtances of government and of manners; encouragement from great men; emulation excited among the men of genius. But as theſe have been thought inadequate to the whole effect, phyſical cauſes have been alſo aſſigned; and the Abbé du Bos, in his Reflections on Poetry and Painting, has collected a great many obſervations on the influence which the air, the climate, and other ſuch natural cauſes, may be ſuppoſed to have upon genius. But whatever the cauſes be, the fact is certain, that there have been certain periods or ages of the world much more diſtinguiſhed than others, for the extraordinary productions of genius.

LEARNED men have marked out four of theſe happy ages. The firſt is the Grecian Age, which commenced near the time of the Peloponneſian war, and extended till the time of Alexander the Great; within which period, we have Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Socrates, Plato, Ariſtotle, Demoſthenes, Æſchines, Lyſias, Iſocrates, Pindar, Æſchylus, Euripides, Sophocles, Ariſtophanes, Menander,

LECT. XXXV.

der, Anacreon, Theocritus, Lyſippus, Apelles, Phidias, Praxiteles. The ſecond is the Roman Age, included nearly within the days of Julius Cæſar and Auguſtus; affording us, Catullus, Lucretius, Terence, Virgil, Horace, Tibullus, Propertius, Ovid, Phædrus, Cæſar, Cicero, Livy, Salluſt, Varro, and Vitruvius. The third Age is, that of the reſtoration of Learning, under the Popes Julius II. and Leo X.; when flouriſhed Arioſto, Taſſo, Sannazarius, Vida, Machiavel, Guicciardini, Davila, Eraſmus, Paul Jovius, Michael Angelo, Raphael, Titian. The fourth, comprehends the Age of Louis XIV. and Queen Anne, when flouriſhed in France, Corneille, Racine, De Retz, Moliere, Boileau, Fontaine, Baptiſte, Rouſſeau, Boſſuet, Fenelon, Bourdaloue, Paſcall, Malebranche, Maſſillon, Bruyere, Bayle, Fontenelle, Vertot; and in England, Dryden, Pope, Addiſon, Prior, Swift, Parnell, Arbuthnot, Congreve, Otway, Young, Rowe, Atterbury, Shaftſbury, Bolingbroke, Tillotſon, Temple, Boyle, Locke, Newton, Clark.

When we ſpeak comparatively of the Antients and the Moderns, we generally mean by the Antients, ſuch as lived in the two firſt of theſe periods, including alſo one or two who lived more early, as Homer in particular; and by the Moderns, thoſe who flouriſhed in

LECT. XXXV.

the two laſt of theſe ages, including alſo the eminent Writers down to our own times. Any compariſon between theſe two claſſes of Writers, muſt neceſſarily be vague and looſe, as they comprehend ſo many, and of ſuch different kinds and degrees of genius. But the compariſon is generally made to turn, by thoſe who are fond of making it, upon two or three of the moſt diſtinguiſhed in each claſs. With much heat it was agitated in France, between Boileau and Mad. Dacier, on the one hand, for the Ancients, and Perrault and La Motte, on the other, for the Moderns; and it was carried to extremes on both ſides. To this day, among men of taſte and letters, we find a leaning to one or other ſide. A few reflections may throw light upon the ſubject, and enable us to diſcern upon what grounds we are to reſt our judgment in this controverſy.

If any one, at this day, in the eighteenth century, takes upon him to decry the antient Claſſics; if he pretends to have diſcovered that Homer and Virgil are Poets of inconſiderable merit, and that Demoſthenes and Cicero are not great Orators, we may boldly venture to tell ſuch a man, that he is come too late with his diſcovery. The reputation of ſuch Writers is eſtabliſhed upon a foundation too ſolid, to be now ſhaken by any arguments

LECT. XXXV.

whatever; for it is eſtabliſhed upon the almoſt univerſal taſte of mankind, proved and tried throughout the ſucceſſion of ſo many ages. Imperfections in their works he may indeed point out; paſſages that are faulty he may ſhew; for where is the human work that is perfect? But, if he attempts to diſcredit their works in general, or to prove that the reputation which they have gained is, on the whole, unjuſt, there is an argument againſt him, which is equal to full demonſtration. He muſt be in the wrong; for human nature is againſt him. In matters of taſte, ſuch as Poetry and Oratory, to whom does the appeal lie? where is the ſtandard? and where the authority of the laſt deciſion? where is it to be looked for, but, as I formerly ſhewed, in thoſe feelings and ſentiments that are found, on the moſt extenſive examination, to be the common ſentiments and feelings of men? Theſe have been fully conſulted on this head. The Public, the unprejudiced Public, has been tried and appealed to for many centuries, and throughout almoſt all civilized nations. It has pronounced its verdict; it has given its ſanction to theſe Writers; and from this Tribunal there lies no farther appeal.

In matters of mere reaſoning, the world may be long in an error; and may be convinced of the error by ſtronger reaſonings, when pro-

LECT. XXXV.

duced. Poſitions that depend upon ſcience, upon knowledge, and matters of fact, may be overturned according as ſcience and knowledge are enlarged, and new matters of fact are brought to light. For this reaſon a ſyſtem of Philoſophy receives no ſufficient ſanction from its antiquity, or long currency. The world, as it grows older, may be juſtly expected to become, if not wiſer, at leaſt more knowing; and ſuppoſing it doubtful whether Ariſtotle, or Newton, were the greater genius, yet Newton's Philoſophy may prevail over Ariſtotle's, by means of later diſcoveries, to which Ariſtotle was a ſtranger. But nothing of this kind holds as to matters of Taſte; which depend not on the progreſs of knowledge and ſcience, but upon ſentiment and feeling. It is in vain to think of undeceiving mankind, with reſpect to errors committed here, as in Philoſophy. For the univerſal feeling of mankind is the natural feeling; and becauſe it is the natural, it is, for that reaſon, the right feeling. The reputation of the Iliad and the Æneid muſt therefore ſtand upon ſure ground, becauſe it has ſtood ſo long; though that of the Ariſtotelian or Platonic Philoſophy, every one is at liberty to call in queſtion.

It is in vain alſo to allege, that the reputation of the antient Poets, and Orators, is owing to authority, to pedantry, and to the

LECT. XXXV.

prejudices of education, tranſmitted from age to age. Theſe, it is true, are the Authors put into our hands at ſchools and colleges, and by that means we have now an early prepoſſeſſion in their favour; but how came they to gain the poſſeſſion of colleges and ſchools? Plainly, by the high fame which theſe Authors had among their own cotemporaries. For the Greek and Latin were not always dead Languages. There was a time when Homer, and Virgil, and Horace, were viewed in the ſame light as we now view Dryden, Pope, and Addiſon. It is not to commentators and univerſities, that the claſſics are indebted for their fame. They became claſſics and ſchool-books, in conſequence of the high admiration which was paid them by the beſt judges in their own country and nation. As early as the days of Juvenal, who wrote under the reign of Domitian, we find Virgil and Horace become the ſtandard books in the education of youth.

Quot ſtabant pueri, cum totus decolor eſſet
Flaccus, & hæreret nigro fuligo Maroni*.

SAT. 7.

* "Then thou art bound to ſmell, on either hand,
"As many ſtinking lamps, as ſchoolboys ſtand,
"When Horace could not read in his own ſully'd book,
"And Virgil's ſacred page was all beſmear'd with ſmoke."

DRYDEN.

FROM

FROM this general principle, then, of the reputation of the great antient Claſſics being ſo early, ſo laſting, ſo extenſive, among all the moſt poliſhed nations, we may juſtly and boldly infer, that their reputation cannot be wholly unjuſt, but muſt have a ſolid foundation in the merit of their writings.

LET us guard, however, againſt a blind and implicit veneration for the Antients, in every thing. I have opened the general principle, which muſt go far in inſtituting a fair compariſon between them and the Moderns. Whatever ſuperiority the Antients may have had in point of genius, yet in all arts, where the natural progreſs of knowledge has had room to produce any conſiderable effects, the Moderns cannot but have ſome advantage. The world may, in certain reſpects, be conſidered as a perſon, who muſt needs gain ſomewhat by advancing in years. Its improvements have not, I confeſs, been always in proportion to the centuries that have paſſed over it; for, during the courſe of ſome ages, it has ſunk as into a total lethargy. Yet, when rouſed from that lethargy, it has generally been able to avail itſelf, more or leſs, of former diſcoveries. At intervals, there aroſe ſome happy genius, who could both improve on what had gone before, and invent ſomething new. With the advantage of a proper ſtock of materials, an inferior genius

LECT. XXXV.

genius can make greater progreſs, than a much ſuperior one, to whom theſe materials are wanting.

HENCE, in Natural Philoſophy, Aſtronomy, Chemiſtry, and other Sciences that depend on an extenſive knowledge and obſervation of facts, Modern Philoſophers have an unqueſtionable ſuperiority over the Antient. I am inclined alſo to think, that in matters of pure reaſoning, there is more preciſion among the Moderns, than in ſome inſtances there was among the Antients; owing perhaps to a more extenſive literary intercourſe, which has improved and ſharpened the faculties of men. In ſome ſtudies too, that relate to taſte and fine writing, which is our object, the progreſs of Society muſt, in equity, be admitted to have given us ſome advantages. For inſtance, in Hiſtory, there is certainly more political knowledge in ſeveral European nations at preſent, than there was in antient Greece and Rome. We are better acquainted with the nature of government, becauſe we have ſeen it under a greater variety of forms and revolutions. The world is more laid open than it was in former times; commerce is greatly enlarged; more countries are civilized; poſts are every where eſtabliſhed; intercourſe is become more eaſy; and the knowledge of facts, by conſequence, more attainable. All theſe

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LECT. XXXV.

are great advantages to Hiſtorians; of which, in ſome meaſure, as I ſhall afterwards ſhow, they have availed themſelves. In the more complex kinds of Poetry, likewiſe, we may have gained ſomewhat, perhaps, in point of regularity and accuracy. In Dramatic Performances, having the advantage of the antient models, we may be allowed to have made ſome improvements, in the variety of the characters, the conduct of the plot, attentions to probability, and to decorums.

THESE ſeem to me the chief points of ſuperiority we can plead above the Antients. Neither do they extend as far, as might be imagined at firſt view. For if the ſtrength of genius be on one ſide, it will go far, in works of taſte at leaſt, to counter-balance all the artificial improvements which can be made by greater knowledge and correctneſs. To return to our compariſon of the age of the world with that of a man; it may be ſaid, not altogether without reaſon, that if the advancing age of the world bring along with it more ſcience and more refinement, there belong, however, to its earlier periods, more vigour, more fire, more enthuſiaſm of genius. This appears indeed to form the characteriſtical difference between the Antient Poets, Orators, and Hiſtorians, compared with the Modern. Among the Antients, we find higher conceptions, greater

SECT. XXXV.

greater ſimplicity, more original fancy. Among the Moderns, ſometimes more art and correctneſs, but feebler exertions of genius. But, though this be in general a mark of diſtinction between the Antients and Moderns, yet, like all general obſervations, it muſt be underſtood with ſome exceptions; for, in point of poetical fire and original genius, Milton and Shakeſpeare are inferior to no Poets in any age.

It is proper to obſerve, that there were ſome circumſtances in antient times, very favourable to thoſe uncommon efforts of genius which were then exerted. Learning was a much more rare and ſingular attainment in the earlier ages, than it is at preſent. It was not to ſchools and univerſities that the perſons applied, who ſought to diſtinguiſh themſelves. They had not this eaſy recourſe. They travelled for their improvement into diſtant countries, to Egypt, and to the Eaſt. They enquired after all the monuments of learning there. They converſed with Prieſts, Philoſophers, Poets, with all who had acquired any diſtinguiſhed fame. They returned to their own country full of the diſcoveries which they had made, and fired by the new and uncommon objects which they had ſeen. Their knowledge and improvements coſt them more labour, raiſed in them more enthuſiaſm, were

attended

attended with higher rewards and honours, than in modern days. Fewer had the means and opportunities of diſtinguiſhing themſelves; but ſuch as did diſtinguiſh themſelves, were ſure of acquiring that fame, and even veneration, which is, of all rewards, the greateſt incentive to genius. Herodotus read his hiſtory to all Greece aſſembled at the Olympic games, and was publicly crowned. In the Peloponneſian war, when the Athenian army was defeated in Sicily, and the priſoners were ordered to be put to death, ſuch of them as could repeat any verſes of Euripides were ſaved, from honour to that Poet, who was a citizen of Athens. Theſe were teſtimonies of public regard, far beyond what modern manners confer upon genius.

LECT. XXXV.

In our times, good writing is conſidered as an attainment, neither ſo difficult, nor ſo high and meritorious.

Scribimus indocti, doctique, Poëmata paſſim *.

We write much more ſupinely, and at our eaſe, than the Antients. To excel, is become a much leſs conſiderable object. Leſs effort, leſs exertion is required, becauſe we have many more aſſiſtances than they. Print-

* "Now every deſperate blockhead dares to write;
"Verſe is the trade of every living wight."
FRANCIS.

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LECT. XXXV.

ing has rendered all books common, and eaſy to be had. Education for any of the learned profeſſions can be carried on without much trouble. Hence a mediocrity of genius is ſpread over all. But to riſe beyond that, and to overtop the crowd, is given to few. The multitude of aſſiſtances which we have for all kinds of compoſition, in the opinion of Sir William Temple, a very competent judge, rather depreſſes than favours, the exertions of native genius. "It is very poſſible," ſays that ingenious Author, in his Eſſay on the Antients and Moderns, "that men may loſe "rather than gain by theſe; may leſſen the "force of their own genius, by forming it "upon that of others; may have leſs know-"ledge of their own, for contenting them-"ſelves with that of thoſe before them. So a "man that only tranſlates, ſhall never be a "Poet; ſo people that truſt to others charity, "rather than their own induſtry, will be "always poor. Who can tell," he adds, "whether learning may not even weaken in-"vention, in a man that has great advantages "from nature? Whether the weight and "number of ſo many other men's thoughts "and notions may not ſuppreſs his own; as "heaping on wood ſometimes ſuppreſſes a "little ſpark, that would otherwiſe have "grown into a flame? The ſtrength of mind, "as well as of body, grows more from the

"warmth

" warmth of exercise, than of clothes; nay, LECT. XXXV.
" too much of this foreign heat, rather makes
" men faint, and their constitutions weaker
" than they would be without them."

From whatever cause it happens, so it is, that among some of the Antient Writers, we must look for the highest models in most of the kinds of elegant Composition. For accurate thinking and enlarged ideas, in several parts of Philosophy, to the Moderns we ought chiefly to have recourse. Of correct and finished writing in some works of taste, they may afford useful patterns; but for all that belongs to original genius, to spirited, masterly, and high execution, our best and most happy ideas are, generally speaking, drawn from the Antients. In Epic Poetry, for instance, Homer and Virgil, to this day, stand not within many degrees of any rival. Orators, such as Cicero and Demosthenes, we have none. In history, notwithstanding some defects, which I am afterwards to mention in the Antient Historical Plans, it may be safely asserted, that we have no such historical narration, so elegant, so picturesque, so animated, and interesting as that of Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Livy, Tacitus, and Sallust. Although the conduct of the drama may be admitted to have received some improvements, yet for Poetry and Sentiment we have nothing to equal Sophocles

LECT. XXXV.

phocles and Euripides; nor any dialogue in Comedy, that comes up to the correct, graceful, and elegant ſimplicity of Terence. We have no ſuch Love Elegies as thoſe of Tibullus; no ſuch Paſtorals as ſome of Theocritus's: and for Lyric Poetry, Horace ſtands quite unrivalled. The name of Horace cannot be mentioned without a particular encomium. That "Curioſa Felicitas," which Petronius has remarked in his expreſſion; the ſweetneſs, elegance, and ſpirit of many of his Odes, the thorough knowledge of the world, the excellent ſentiments, and natural eaſy manner which diſtinguiſh his Satires and Epiſtles, all contribute to render him one of thoſe very few Authors whom one never tires of reading; and from whom alone, were every other monument deſtroyed, we ſhould be led to form a very high idea of the taſte and genius of the Auguſtan Age.

To all ſuch then, as wiſh to form their taſte, and nouriſh their genius, let me warmly recommend the aſſiduous ſtudy of the Antient Claſſics, both Greek and Roman.

Nocturnâ verſate manu, verſate diurnâ *.

Without a conſiderable acquaintance with them, no man can be reckoned a polite

* "Read them by day, and ſtudy them by night."
FRANCIS.

ſcholar;

LECT. XXXV.

ſcholar; and he will want many aſſiſtances for writing and ſpeaking well, which the knowledge of ſuch Authors would afford him. Any one has great reaſon to ſuſpect his own taſte, who receives little or no pleaſure from the peruſal of Writings, which ſo many ages and nations have conſented in holding up as objects of admiration. And I am perſuaded, it will be found, that in proportion as the Antients are generally ſtudied and admired, or are unknown and diſregarded in any country, good taſte and good compoſition will flouriſh, or decline. They are commonly none but the ignorant or ſuperficial, who undervalue them.

At the ſame time, a juſt and high regard for the prime writers of antiquity is to be always diſtinguiſhed, from that contempt of every thing which is Modern, and that blind veneration for all that has been written in Greek or Latin, which belongs only to pedants. Among the Greek and Roman Authors, ſome aſſuredly deſerve much higher regard than others; nay, ſome are of no great value. Even the beſt of them lie open occaſionally to juſt cenſure; for to no human performance is it given, to be abſolutely perfect. We may, we ought therefore to read them with a diſtinguiſhing eye, ſo as to propoſe for imitation their beauties only; and it is perfectly conſiſtent with juſt and candid criticiſm, to find

LECT. XXXV.

fault with parts, while, at the ſame time, it admires the whole.

After theſe reflections on the Antients and Moderns, I proceed to a critical examination of the moſt diſtinguiſhed kinds of Compoſition, and the Characters of thoſe Writers who have excelled in them, whether Modern or Antient.

The moſt general diviſion of the different kinds of Compoſition is, into thoſe written in Proſe, and thoſe written in Verſe; which certainly require to be ſeparately conſidered, becauſe ſubject to ſeparate laws. I begin, as is moſt natural, with Writings in Proſe. Of Orations, or Public Diſcourſes of all kinds, I have already treated fully. The remaining ſpecies of Proſe Compoſitions, which aſſume any ſuch regular form, as to fall under the cognizance of Criticiſm, ſeem to be chiefly theſe: Hiſtorical Writing, Philoſophical Writing, Epiſtolary Writing, and Fictitious Hiſtory. Hiſtorical Compoſition ſhall be firſt conſidered; and, as it is an object of dignity, I purpoſe to treat of it at ſome length.

As it is the office of an Orator to perſuade, it is that of an Hiſtorian to record truth for the inſtruction of mankind. This is the proper object and end of hiſtory, from which may be deduced many of the laws relating to it; and if

LECT. XXXV.

if this object were always kept in view, it would prevent many of the errors into which perſons are apt to fall, concerning this ſpecies of Compoſition. As the primary end of Hiſtory is to record Truth, Impartiality, Fidelity, and Accuracy, are the fundamental qualities of an Hiſtorian. He muſt neither be a Panegyriſt nor a Satiriſt. He muſt not enter into faction, nor give ſcope to affection: but, contemplating paſt events and characters with a cool and diſpaſſionate eye, muſt preſent to his Readers a faithful copy of human nature.

At the ſame time, it is not every record of facts, however true, that is entitled to the name of Hiſtory; but ſuch a record as enables us to apply the tranſactions of former ages for our own inſtruction. The facts ought to be momentous and important; repreſented in connection with their cauſes; traced to their effects; and unfolded in clear and diſtinct order. For wiſdom is the great end of Hiſtory. It is deſigned to ſupply the want of experience. Though it enforce not its inſtructions with the ſame authority, yet it furniſhes us with a greater variety of inſtructions, than it is poſſible for experience to afford, in the courſe of the longeſt life. Its object is, to enlarge our views of the human character, and to give full exerciſe to our judgment on human affairs. It muſt not therefore be a tale calculated to pleaſe only,

LECT. XXXV.

only, and addreſſed to the fancy. Gravity and dignity are eſſential characteriſtics of Hiſtory; no light ornaments are to be employed, no flippancy of ſtyle, no quaintneſs of wit. But the Writer muſt ſuſtain the character of a wiſe man, writing for the inſtruction of poſterity; one who has ſtudied to inform himſelf well, who has pondered his ſubject with care, and addreſſes himſelf to our judgment, rather than to our imagination. At the ſame time, Hiſtorical Writing is by no means inconſiſtent with ornamented and ſpirited narration. It admits of much high ornament and elegance; but the ornaments muſt be always conſiſtent with dignity; they ſhould not appear to be ſought after; but to riſe naturally from a mind animated by the events which it records.

Historical Compoſition is underſtood to comprehend under it, Annals, Memoirs, Lives. But theſe are its inferior ſubordinate ſpecies; on which I ſhall hereafter make ſome reflections, when I ſhall have firſt conſidered what belongs to a regular and legitimate work of Hiſtory. Such a work is chiefly of two kinds. Either the entire Hiſtory of ſome ſtate or kingdom through its different revolutions, ſuch as Livy's Roman Hiſtory; or the Hiſtory of ſome one great event, or ſome portion or period of time which may be conſidered as making a whole by itſelf; ſuch as, Thucydides's Hiſtory

tory of the Peloponneſian war, Davila's Hiſtory of the Civil Wars of France, or Clarendon's of thoſe of England. LECT. XXXV.

In the conduct and management of his ſubject, the firſt attention requiſite in an Hiſtorian, is to give it as much unity as poſſible; that is, his Hiſtory ſhould not conſiſt of ſeparate unconnected parts merely, but ſhould be bound together by ſome connecting principle, which ſhall make the impreſſion on the mind of ſomething that is one, whole and entire. It is inconceivable how great an effect this, when happily executed, has upon a Reader, and it is ſurpriſing that ſome able Writers of Hiſtory have not attended to it more. Whether pleaſure or inſtruction be the end ſought by the ſtudy of Hiſtory, either of them is enjoyed to much greater advantage, when the mind has always before it the progreſs of ſome one great plan or ſyſtem of actions; when there is ſome point or centre, to which we can refer the various facts related by the Hiſtorian.

In general Hiſtories, which record the affairs of a whole nation or empire throughout ſeveral ages, this unity, I confeſs, muſt be more imperfect. Yet even there, ſome degree of it can be preſerved by a ſkilful Writer. For though the whole, taken together, be very complex, yet the great conſtituent parts of it,

LECT. XXXV.

form ſo many ſubordinate wholes, when taken by themſelves; each of which can be treated both as complete within itſelf, and as connected with what goes before and follows. In the Hiſtory of a Monarchy, for inſtance, every reign ſhould have its own unity; a beginning, a middle, and an end to the ſyſtem of affairs; while, at the ſame time, we are taught to diſcern how that ſyſtem of affairs roſe from the preceding, and how it is inſerted into what follows. We ſhould be able to trace all the ſecret links of the chain, which binds together remote, and ſeemingly unconnected events. In ſome kingdoms of Europe, it was the plan of many ſucceſſive Princes to reduce the power of their nobles; and during ſeveral reigns, moſt of the leading actions had a reference to this end. In other ſtates, the riſing power of the Commons, influenced for a tract of time the courſe and connection of public affairs. Among the Romans, the leading principle was a gradual extenſion of conqueſt, and the attainment of univerſal empire. The continual increaſe of their power, advancing towards this end from ſmall beginnings, and by a ſort of regular progreſſive plan, furniſhed to Livy a happy ſubject for hiſtorical unity, in the midſt of a great variety of tranſactions.

Of all the antient general Hiſtorians, the one who had the moſt exact idea of this quality of

LECT. XXXV.

of Hiſtorical Compoſition, though, in other reſpects, not an elegant Writer, is Polybius. This appears from the account he gives of his own plan in the beginning of his Third Book; obſerving, that the ſubject of which he had undertaken to write, is, throughout the whole of it, one action, one great ſpectacle; how, and by what cauſes, all the parts of the habitable world became ſubject to the Roman Empire. "This action," ſays he, "is diſtinct in its "beginning, determined in its duration, and "clear in its final accompliſhment; therefore, "I think it of uſe, to give a general view be-"forehand, of the chief conſtituent parts "which make up this whole." In another place, he congratulates himſelf on his good fortune, in having a ſubject for Hiſtory, which allowed ſuch variety of parts to be united under one view; remarking, that before this period, the affairs of the world were ſcattered, and without connection; whereas, in the times of which he writes, all the great tranſactions of the world tended and verged to one point, and were capable of being conſidered as parts of one ſyſtem. Whereupon he adds ſeveral very judicious obſervations, concerning the uſefulneſs of writing Hiſtory upon ſuch a comprehenſive and connected plan; comparing the imperfect degree of knowledge, which is afforded by particular facts without general views, to the imperfect idea which one would

LECT. XXXV.

entertain of an animal, who had beheld its ſeparate parts only, without having ever ſeen its entire form and ſtructure *.

SUCH as write the hiſtory of ſome particular great tranſaction, as confine themſelves to one æra, or one portion of the hiſtory of a nation, have ſo great advantages for preſerving hiſtorical unity, that they are inexcuſable if they fail in it. Salluſt's Hiſtories of the Catilinarian and Jugurthine wars, Xenophon's Cyropœdia, and his Retreat of the Ten Thouſand, are inſtances of particular Hiſtories, where the unity of hiſtorical object is perfectly well maintained. Thucydides, otherwiſe a Writer of great ſtrength and dignity, has failed much, in this article, in his hiſtory of the Peloponne-

* Καθόλω μὲν γαρ ἔμοιγε δοκοῦσιν οἱ πεπεισμένοι διὰ της κατα μέρος ἱστοριάς μετρίως συνόψέσθαι τὰ ὁλα, παραπλήσιον τι πάσχειν, ὡς ἄν εἴ τινες ἐμψύχῳ και καλοῦ σώματος γεγονότος διεῤῥεμένα τα μερη θεώμενοι, νομίζοιεν ἱκανῶς αὐτόπται γιγνισθαι της ἐνεργείας αὐτοῦ τῳ ζῴου και καλλονης. ἐι γάρ τις αὐτίκα μαλα συνθείς και τέλειον ἄυθις ἀπεργασαμενος το ζῶον, τῳ τε εἰδει δε τῆ τῆς ψυχης ευπρεπεία, κἄπειτα παλίν επιδείκνυοι τοῖς αὐτοίς ἐκείνοις, ταχεως ἄν οἶμαι πάντας αὐτούς ὁμολογήσειν διὸ τι και λίαν πολυ τι τῆς ἀληθείας ἀπελείπετο προσθέν, και παραπλήσιον τοῖς ὀνειρώτλουσιν ἦσαν. ἔννοιαν μὲν γὰρ λαβεῖν απο μερης τῶν ὅλων δυναλόν. ἐπιςήμην δὲ καὶ γνώμην ἀτρεκῆ ἔχειν ἀδύνατον. διο παντελῶς βραχυ τι νομιστέον συμβάλλεσθαι τὴν κατὰ μέρος ἱστορίαν προς τήν τῶν ὅλων ἐμπειρίαν και πίςιν. ἐκ μέν τοιγε τῆς απαντων προς ἄλληλα συμπλοκης και παραθέσεως, ετι δ' ὁμοιότητος και διαφορᾶς μόνως ἄν τις ἐφίκοιτο και δυνηθείη κατοπτευσας ἅμα καὶ το χρήσιμον καὶ το τερπνὸν, εκ της ἱστορίας λαβεῖν.

POLYB. Hiſtor. Prim.

fian

LECT. XXXV.

ſian war. No one great object is properly purſued, and kept in view; but his narration is cut down into ſmall pieces; his hiſtory is divided by ſummers and winters; and we are every now and then leaving tranſactions unfiniſhed, and are hurried from place to place, from Athens to Sicily, from thence to Peloponneſus, to Corcyra, to Mitylene, that we may be told of what is going on in all theſe places. We have a great many disjointed parts, and ſcattered limbs, which with difficulty we collect into one body; and through this faulty diſtribution and management of his ſubject, that judicious Hiſtorian becomes more tireſome, and leſs agreeable than he would otherwiſe be. For theſe reaſons, he is ſeverely cenſured by one of the beſt Critics of antiquity, Dionyſius of Halicarnaſſus*.

THE

* The cenſure which Dionyſius paſſes upon Thucydides, is, in ſeveral articles, carried too far. He blames him for the choice of his ſubject, as not ſufficiently ſplendid and agreeable, and as abounding too much in crimes and melancholy events, on which he obſerves that Thucydides loves to dwell. He is partial to Herodotus, whom, both for the choice and the conduct of his ſubject, he prefers to the other Hiſtorian. It is true, that the ſubject of Thucydides wants the gaiety and ſplendor of that of Herodotus; but it is not deficient in dignity. The Peloponneſian war was the conteſt between two great rival powers, the Athenian and Lacedemonian ſtates, for the empire of Greece. Herodotus loves to dwell on proſperous incidents, and retains ſomewhat of the amuſing manner of the antient poetical hiſto-

LECT. XXXV.

THE Hiſtorian muſt not indeed neglect chronological order, with a view to render his narration agreeable. He muſt give a diſtinct account of the dates, and of the coincidence of facts. But he is not under the neceſſity of breaking off always in the middle of tranſactions, in order to inform us of what was happening elſewhere at the ſame time. He diſcovers no art, if he cannot form ſome connection among the affairs which he relates, ſo as to introduce them in a proper train. He will ſoon tire the Reader, if he goes on recording,

hiſtorians. But Herodotus wrote to the Imagination. Thucydides writes to the Underſtanding. He was a grave reflecting man, well acquainted with human life; and the melancholy events and cataſtrophes which he records, are often both the moſt intereſting parts of hiſtory, and the moſt improving to the heart.

The Critic's obſervations on the faulty diſtribution which Thucydides makes of his ſubject, are better founded, and his preference of Herodotus, in this reſpect, is not unjuſt.—Θουκυδιδης μεν τοις χρονοις ακολουθων, Ηροδοτος δε ταις περιοχαις των πραγματων, γινεται Θουκυδιδες ασαφης και δυσπαρακολουθητος· πολλων γαρ κατα το αυτο θερος και χειμωνα γινομενων εν διαφοραις τοποις, ημιτελεις τας προτας πραξεις καταλιπων, ετερων απτεται των κατα το αυτο θερος και χειμωνα γινομενων. πλανωμεθα δη καθαπερ εικος, και δυσκολως τοις δηλημενοις παρακολουθουμεν. Συμβεβηκε Θουκυδιδη μιαν υποθεσιν λαβοντι πολλα ποιησαι μερη του ενος σωματος. Ηροδοτω δε τας πολλας και εδεν εοικυιας υποθεσεις προειλομενω, συμφωνον εν σωμα πεποιηκεναι. With regard to Style, Dionyſius gives Thucydides the juſt praiſe of energy and brevity; but cenſures him, on many occaſions, not without reaſon, for harſh and obſcure expreſſion, deficient in ſmoothneſs and eaſe.

in ſtrict chronological order, a multitude of ſeparate tranſactions, connected by nothing elſe, but their happening at the ſame time. LECT. XXXV.

THOUGH the hiſtory of Herodotus be of greater compaſs than that of Thucydides, and comprehend a much greater variety of diſſimilar parts, he has been more fortunate in joining them together; and digeſting them into order. Hence he is a more pleaſing Writer, and gives a ſtronger impreſſion of his ſubject; though in judgment and accuracy, much inferior to Thucydides. With digreſſions and epiſodes he abounds; but when theſe have any connection with the main ſubject, and are inſerted profeſſedly as epiſodes, the unity of the whole is leſs violated by them, than by a broken and ſcattered narration of the principal ſtory. Among the Moderns, the Preſident Thuanus has, by attempting to make the Hiſtory of his own times too comprehenſive, fallen into the ſame error, of loading the Reader with a great variety of unconnected facts, going on together in different parts of the world: an Hiſtorian otherwiſe of great probity, candour, and excellent underſtanding; but through this want of unity, more tedious, and leſs intereſting than he would otherwiſe have been.

LECTURE XXXVI.

HISTORICAL WRITING.

LECT. XXXVI.

AFTER making ſome obſervations on the controverſy which has been often carried on concerning the comparative merit of the Antients and the Moderns, I entered, in the laſt Lecture, on the conſideration of Hiſtorical Writing. The general idea of Hiſtory is, a record of truth for the inſtruction of mankind. Hence ariſe the primary qualities required in a good Hiſtorian, impartiality, fidelity, gravity, and dignity. What I principally conſidered, was the unity which belongs to this ſort of Compoſition; the nature of which I have endeavoured to explain.

I PROCEED next to obſerve, that in order to fulfil the end of Hiſtory, the Author muſt ſtudy to trace to their ſprings the actions and events which he records. Two things are eſpecially neceſſary for his doing this ſucceſsfully; a thorough acquaintance with human nature,

nature, and political knowledge, or acquaintance with government. The former is neceſſary to account for the conduct of individuals, and to give juſt views of their character; the latter, to account for the revolutions of government, and the operation of political cauſes on public affairs. Both muſt concur, in order to form a completely inſtructive Hiſtorian.

With regard to the latter article, Political Knowledge, the antient Writers wanted ſome advantages which the Moderns enjoy; from whom, upon that account, we have a title to expect more accurate and preciſe information. The world, as I formerly hinted, was more ſhut up in antient times, than it is now; there was then leſs communication among neighbouring ſtates, and by conſequence leſs knowledge of one another's affairs; no intercourſe by eſtabliſhed poſts, or by Ambaſſadors reſident at diſtant courts. The knowledge, and materials of the antient Hiſtorians, were thereby more limited and circumſcribed; and it is to be obſerved too, that they wrote for their own countrymen only; they had no idea of writing for the inſtruction of foreigners, whom they deſpiſed, or of the world in general; and hence, they are leſs attentive to convey all that knowledge with regard to domeſtic policy, which we, in diſtant times, would deſire to have learned from them. Perhaps

LECT. XXXVI.

haps alſo, though in antient ages men were abundantly animated with the love of liberty, yet the full extent of the influence of government, and of political cauſes, was not then ſo thoroughly ſcrutinized, as it has been in modern times; when a longer experience of all the different modes of government has rendered men more enlightened and intelligent, with reſpect to public affairs.

To theſe reaſons it is owing, that though the antient Hiſtorians ſet before us the particular facts which they relate, in a very diſtinct and beautiful manner, yet ſometimes they do not give us a clear view of all the political cauſes, which affected the ſituation of affairs of which they treat. From the Greek Hiſtorians, we are able to form but an imperfect notion, of the ſtrength, the wealth, and the revenues of the different Grecian ſtates; of the cauſes of ſeveral of thoſe revolutions that happened in their government; or of their ſeparate connections and interfering intereſts. In writing the Hiſtory of the Romans, Livy had ſurely the moſt ample field for diſplaying political knowledge, concerning the riſe of their greatneſs, and the advantages or defects of their government. Yet the inſtruction in theſe important articles, which he affords, is not conſiderable. An elegant Writer he is, and a beautiful relater of facts, if ever there

was

LECT. XXXVI.

was one; but by no means diſtinguiſhed for profoundneſs or penetration. Salluſt, when writing the hiſtory of a conſpiracy againſt the government, which ought to have been altogether a Political Hiſtory, has evidently attended more to the elegance of narration, and the painting of characters, than to the unfolding of ſecret cauſes and ſprings. Inſtead of that complete information, which we would naturally have expected from him of the ſtate of parties in Rome, and of that particular conjuncture of affairs, which enabled ſo deſperate a profligate as Catiline to become ſo formidable to government, he has given us little more than a general declamatory account of the luxury and corruption of manners in that age, compared with the ſimplicity of former times.

I BY no means, however, mean to cenſure all the antient Hiſtorians as defective in political information. No Hiſtorians can be more inſtructive than Thucydides, Polybius, and Tacitus. Thucydides is grave, intelligent, and judicious; always attentive to give very exact information concerning every operation which he relates; and to ſhew the advantages or diſadvantages of every plan that was propoſed, and every meaſure that was purſued. Polybius excels in comprehenſive political views, in penetration into great ſyſtems, and in

LECT. XXXVI.

in his profound and distinct knowledge of all military affairs. Tacitus is eminent for his knowledge of the human heart; is sentimental and refined in a high degree; conveys much instruction with respect to political matters, but more with respect to human nature.

But when we demand from the Historian profound and instructive views of his subject, it is not meant that he should be frequently interrupting the course of his History, with his own reflections and speculations. He should give us all the information that is necessary for our fully understanding the affairs which he records. He should make us acquainted with the political constitution, the force, the revenues, the internal state of the country of which he writes; and with its interests and connections in respect of neighbouring countries. He should place us, as on an elevated station, whence we may have an extensive prospect of all the causes that co-operate in bringing forward the events which are related. But having put into our hands all the proper materials for judgment, he should not be too prodigal of his own opinions and reasonings. When an Historian is much given to dissertation, and is ready to philosophise and speculate on all that he records, a suspicion naturally arises, that he will be in hazard of adapting his narrative of facts to favour some system

which he has formed to himſelf. It is rather by fair and judicious narration that Hiſtory ſhould inſtruct us, than by delivering inſtruction in an avowed and direct manner. On ſome occaſions, when doubtful points require to be ſcrutinized, or when ſome great event is in agitation, concerning the cauſes or circumſtances of which mankind have been much divided, the narrative may be allowed to ſtand ſtill for a little; the Hiſtorian may appear, and may with propriety enter into ſome weighty diſcuſſion. But he muſt take care not to cloy his Readers with ſuch diſcuſſions, by repeating them too often.

When obſervations are to be made concerning human nature in general, or the peculiarities of certain characters, if the Hiſtorian can artfully incorporate ſuch obſervations with his narrative, they will have a better effect than when they are delivered as formal detached reflections. For inſtance; in the life of Agricola, Tacitus, ſpeaking of Domitian's treatment of Agricola, makes this obſervation: "Proprium humani ingenii eſt, odiſſe quem "læſeris*." The obſervation is juſt and well applied; but the form, in which it ſtands, is abſtract and philoſophical. A thought of the

* "It belongs to human nature, to hate the man whom "you have injured."

LECT. XXXVI.

ſame kind has a finer effect elſewhere in the ſame Hiſtorian, when ſpeaking of the jealouſies which Germanicus knew to be entertained againſt him by Livia and Tiberius: "Anxius," ſays he, "occultis in ſe patrui aviæque odiis, "quorum cauſæ acriores quia iniquæ *." Here a profound moral obſervation is made; but it is made, without the appearance of making it in form; it is introduced as a part of the narration, in aſſigning a reaſon for the anxiety of Germanicus. We have another inſtance of the ſame kind, in the account which he gives of a mutiny raiſed againſt Rufus, who was a "Præfectus Caſtrorum," on account of the ſevere labour which he impoſed on the ſoldiers. "Quippe Rufus, diu mani-"pularis, dein centurio, mox caſtris præfectus, "antiquam duramque militiam revocabat, ve-"tus operis & laboris, et eo immitior quia "toleraverat †." There was room for turning this into a general obſervation, that they who have been educated and hardened in toils,

* "Uneaſy in his mind, on account of the concealed "hatred entertained againſt him by his uncle and grand-"mother, which was the more bitter, becauſe the cauſe of "it was unjuſt."

† "For Rufus, who had long been a common ſoldier, "afterwards a Centurion, and at length a general officer, "reſtored the ſevere military diſcipline of antient times. "Grown old amidſt toils and labours, he was the more "rigid in impoſing them, becauſe he had been accuſtomed "to bear them."

LECT. XXXVI.

are commonly found to be the moſt ſevere in requiring the like toils from others. But the manner in which Tacitus introduces this ſentiment, as a ſtroke in the character of Rufus, gives it much more life and ſpirit. This Hiſtorian has a particular talent of intermixing after this manner with the courſe of his narrative, many ſtriking ſentiments and uſeful obſervations.

Let us next proceed to conſider the proper qualities of Hiſtorical Narration. It is obvious, that on the manner of narration much muſt depend, as the firſt notion of Hiſtory is the recital of paſt facts; and how much one mode of recital may be preferable to another, we ſhall ſoon be convinced, by thinking of the different effects, which the ſame ſtory, when told by two different perſons, is found to produce.

The firſt virtue of Hiſtorical Narration, is Clearneſs, Order, and due Connection. To attain this, the Hiſtorian muſt be completely maſter of his ſubject; he muſt ſee the whole as at one view; and comprehend the chain and dependance of all its parts, that he may introduce every thing in its proper place; that he may lead us ſmoothly along the track of affairs which are recorded, and may always give us the ſatisfaction of ſeeing how one event

LECT. XXXVI.

ariſes out of another. Without this, there can be neither pleaſure nor inſtruction, in reading Hiſtory. Much for this end will depend on the obſervance of that unity in the general plan and conduct, which, in the preceding Lecture, I recommended. Much too will depend on the proper management of tranſitions, which forms one of the chief ornaments of this kind of writing, and is one of the moſt difficult in execution. Nothing tries an Hiſtorian's abilities more, than ſo to lay his train beforehand, as to make us paſs naturally and agreeably from one part of his ſubject to another; to employ no clumſy and awkward junctures; and to contrive ways and means of forming ſome union among tranſactions, which ſeem to be moſt widely ſeparated from one another.

In the next place, as Hiſtory is a very dignified ſpecies of Compoſition, gravity muſt always be maintained in the narration. There muſt be no meanneſs nor vulgarity in the ſtyle; no quaint, nor colloquial phraſes; no affectation of pertneſs, or of wit. The ſmart, or the ſneering manner of telling a ſtory, is inconſiſtent with the hiſtorical character. I do not ſay, that an Hiſtorian is never to let himſelf down. He may ſometimes do it with propriety, in order to diverſify the ſtrain of his narration, which, if it be perfectly uniform, is apt

apt to become tireſome. But he ſhould be careful never to deſcend too far; and, on occaſions where a light or ludicrous anecdote is proper to be recorded, it is generally better to throw it into a note, than to hazard becoming too familiar, by introducing it into the body of the work.

But an Hiſtorian may poſſeſs theſe qualities of being perſpicuous, diſtinct, and grave, and may notwithſtanding be a dull Writer: in which caſe, we ſhall reap little benefit from his labours. We ſhall read him without pleaſure; or, moſt probably, we ſhall ſoon give over reading him at all. He muſt therefore ſtudy to render his narration intereſting; which is the quality that chiefly diſtinguiſhes a Writer of genius and eloquence.

Two things are eſpecially conducive to this; the firſt is, a juſt medium in the conduct of narration, between a rapid or crowded recital of facts, and a prolix detail. The former embarraſſes, and the latter tires us. An Hiſtorian that would intereſt us, muſt know when to be conciſe, and where he ought to enlarge; paſſing conciſely over ſlight and unimportant events, but dwelling on ſuch as are ſtriking and conſiderable in their nature, or pregnant with conſequences; preparing beforehand our attention to them, and bringing them forth into the moſt full and conſpicuous light. The

LECT. XXXVI.

next thing he muſt attend to, is a proper ſelection of the circumſtances belonging to thoſe events, which he chooſes to relate fully. General facts make a ſlight impreſſion on the mind. It is by means of circumſtances and particulars properly choſen, that a narration becomes intereſting and affecting to the Reader. Theſe give life, body, and colouring to the recital of facts, and enable us to behold them as preſent, and paſſing before our eyes. It is this employment of circumſtances, in Narration, that is properly termed Hiſtorical Painting.

In all theſe virtues of Narration, particularly in this laſt, of pictureſque deſcriptive Narration, ſeveral of the Antient Hiſtorians eminently excel. Hence, the pleaſure that is found in reading Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Livy, Salluſt, and Tacitus. They are all conſpicuous for the Art of Narration. Herodotus is, at all times, an agreeable Writer, and relates every thing with that *naïveté* and ſimplicity of manner, which never fails to intereſt the Reader. Though the manner of Thucydides be more dry and harſh, yet, on great occaſions, as when he is giving an account of the Plague of Athens, the Siege of Platæa, the Sedition in Corcyra, the Defeat of the Athenians in Sicily, he diſplays a very ſtrong and maſterly power of deſcription.

Xenophon's

LECT. XXXVI.

Xenophon's Cyropædia, and his Anabaſis, or retreat of the Ten Thouſand, are extremely beautiful. The circumſtances are finely ſelected, and the Narration is eaſy and engaging; but his Hellenics, or Continuation of the Hiſtory of Thucydides, is a much inferior work. Salluſt's Art of Hiſtorical Painting in his Catilinarian, but, more eſpecially, in his Jugurthine War, is well known; though his Style is liable to cenſure, as too ſtudied and affected.

Livy is more unexceptionable in his manner; and is excelled by no Hiſtorian whatever in the Art of Narration: ſeveral remarkable examples might be given from him. His account, for inſtance, of the famous defeat of the Roman army by the Samnites, at the Furcæ Caudinæ, in the beginning of the ninth book, affords one of the moſt beautiful exemplifications of Hiſtorical Painting, that is any where to be met with. We have firſt, an exact deſcription of the narrow paſs between two mountains, into which the enemy had decoyed the Romans. When they find themſelves caught, and no hope of eſcape left, we are made to ſee, firſt, their aſtoniſhment, next, their indignation, and then, their dejection, painted in the moſt lively manner, by ſuch circumſtances and actions as were natural to perſons in their ſituation. The reſtleſs and un-

LECT. XXXVI.

quiet manner in which they paſs the night; the conſultations of the Samnites; the various meaſures propoſed to be taken; the meſſages between the two armies, all heighten the ſcene. At length, in the morning, the Conſuls return to the camp, and inform them that they could receive no other terms but that of ſurrendering their arms, and paſſing under the yoke, which was conſidered as the laſt mark of ignominy for a conquered army. Part of what then follows, I ſhall give in the Author's own words. "Redintegravit luctum in caſtris "conſulum adventus; ut vix ab iis abſtine- "rent manus, quorum temeritate in eum lo- "cum deducti eſſent. Alii alios intueri, con- "templari arma mox tradenda, & inermes fu- "turas dextras; proponere ſibimet ipſi ante "oculos, jugum hoſtile, et ludibria victoris, "et vultus ſuperbos, et per armatos inermium "iter. Inde fædi agminis miſerabilem viam; "per ſociorum urbes reditum in patriam ac pa- "rentes quo ſæpe ipſi triumphantes veniſſent. "Se ſolos ſine vulnere, ſine ferro, ſine acie vic- "tos; ſibi non ſtringere licuiſſe gladios, non "manum cum hoſte conſerere; ſibi nequicquam "arma, nequicquam vires, nequicquam animos "datos. Hæc frementibus, hora fatalis igno- "miniæ advenit. Jamprimùm, cum ſingulis "veſtimentis, inermes extra vallum abire juſſi. "Tum a conſulibus abire lictores juſſi, palu-

"damentaque

" damentaque detracta. Tantam hoc inter " ipſos, qui paulo ante eos dedendos, laceran- " doſque cenſuerant, miſerationem fecit, ut " ſuæ quiſque conditionis oblitus, ab illa de- " formatione tantæ majeſtatis, velut ab ne- " fando ſpectaculo, averteret oculos. Primi " conſules, prope ſeminudi, ſub jugum miſ- " ſi*," &c. The reſt of the ſtory, which it would

LECT. XXXVI.

* " The arrival of the Conſuls in the camp, wrought " up their paſſions to ſuch a degree, that they could ſcarcely " abſtain from laying violent hands on them, as by their " raſhneſs they had been brought into this ſituation. They " began to look on one another; to caſt a melancholy eye " on their arms, which were now to be ſurrendered, and on " their right hands, which were to become defenceleſs. " The yoke under which they were to paſs; the ſcoffs of " the conquerors; and their haughty looks, when, diſ- " armed and ſtripped, they ſhould be led through the hoſtile " lines; all roſe before their eyes. They then looked for- " ward to the ſad journey which awaited them, when they " were to paſs as a vanquiſhed and diſgraced army through " the territories of their allies, by whom they had often " been beheld returning in triumph to their families and " native land. They alone, they muttered to one another, " without an engagement, without a ſingle blow, had " been conquered. To their hard fate it fell, never to " have had it in their power to draw a ſword, or to look an " enemy in the face; to them only, arms, ſtrength, and " courage, had been given in vain. While they were thus " giving vent to their indignation, the fatal moment of " their ignominy arrived. Firſt, they were all commanded " to come forth from the camp, without armour, and in a " ſingle garment. Next, orders were given, that the Con- " ſuls ſhould be left without their Lictors, and that they " ſhould

LECT. XXXVI.

would be too long to inſert, is carried on with the ſame beauty, and full of pictureſque circumſtances *.

TACITUS

" ſhould be ſtripped of their robes. Such commiſeration " did this affront excite among them, who, but a little be- " fore, had been for delivering up thoſe very Conſuls to the " enemy, and for putting them to death, that every one " forgot his own condition, and turned his eyes aſide from " this infamous diſgrace, ſuffered by the conſular dignity, " as from a ſpectacle which was too deteſtable to be beheld. " The Conſuls, almoſt half naked, were firſt made to paſs " under the yoke," &c.

* The deſcription which Cæſar gives of the conſternation occaſioned in his camp, by the accounts which were ſpread among his troops, of the ferocity, the ſize, and the courage of the Germans, affords an inſtance of Hiſtorical Painting, executed in a ſimple manner; and, at the ſame time, exhibiting a natural and lively ſcene: " Dum pau- " cos dies ad Veſontionem moratur, ex percunctatione " noſtrorum, vocibuſque Gallorum ac mercatorum, qui in- " genti magnitudine corporum Germanos, incredibili vir- " tute, atque exercitatione in armis eſſe prædicabant; ſæpe " numero ſeſe cum iis congreſſos, ne vultum quidem, atque " aciem oculorum ferre potuiſſe; tantus ſubito terror om- " nem exercitum occupavit, ut non mediocriter omnium " mentes animoſque perturbaret. Hic primum ortus eſt a " tribunis militum, ac præfectis, reliquiſque qui ex urbe, " amicitiæ cauſa, Cæſarem ſecuti, ſuum periculum miſera- " bantur, quod non magnum in re militari uſum habe- " bant: quorum alius, aliâ cauſâ illatâ quam ſibi ad profi- " ciſcendum neceſſariam eſſe diceret, petebat ut ejus volun- " tate diſcedere liceret. Nonnulli pudore adducti, ut timo- " ris ſuſpicionem vitarent, remanebant. Hi neque vultum " fingere, neque interdum lacrymas tenere poterant. Ab- " diti in tabernaculis, aut ſuum fatum quærebantur, aut

" cum

TACITUS is another Author eminent for Hiſtorical Painting, though in a manner altogether different from that of Livy. Livy's deſcriptions are more full, more plain, and natural; thoſe of Tacitus conſiſt in a few bold ſtrokes. He ſelects one or two remarkable circumſtances, and ſets them before us in a ſtrong, and, generally, in a new and uncommon light. Such is the following picture of the ſituation of Rome, and of the Emperor Galba, when Otho was advancing againſt him: "Agebatur huc illuc Galba, vario turbæ fluc-"tuantis impulſu, completis undique baſilicis "et templis, lugubri proſpectu. Neque po-"puli aut plebis ulla vox; ſed attoniti vul-"tus, et converſæ ad omnia aures. Non tu-"multus, non quies; ſed quale magni metûs, "et magnæ iræ, ſilentium eſt *." No image, in any Poet, is more ſtrong and expreſſive than this laſt ſtroke of the deſcription: "Non tu-

"cum familiaribus ſuis, commune periculum miſerabantur. "Vulgo, totis caſtris teſtamenta obſignabantur." DE BELL. GALL. L. I.

* "Galba was driven to and fro by the tide of the mul-"titude, ſhoving him from place to place. The temples "and public buildings were filled with crowds of a diſmal "appearance. No clamours were heard, either from "the citizens, or from the rabble. Their countenances "were filled with conſternation; their ears were employed "in liſtening with anxiety. It was not a tumult; it was "not quietneſs; it was the ſilence of terror, and of "wrath."

"multus,

LECT. XXXVI.

"multus, non quies, ſed quale," &c. This is a conception of the ſublime kind, and diſcovers high genius. Indeed, throughout all his work, Tacitus ſhows the hand of a maſter. As he is profound in reflection, ſo he is ſtriking in deſcription, and pathetic in ſentiment. The Philoſopher, the Poet, and the Hiſtorian, all meet in him. Though the period of which he writes may be reckoned unfortunate for an Hiſtorian, he has made it afford us many intereſting exhibitions of human nature. The relations which he gives of the deaths of ſeveral eminent perſonages, are as affecting as the deepeſt tragedies. He paints with a glowing pencil; and poſſeſſes, beyond all Writers, the talent of painting, not to the imagination merely, but to the heart. With many of the moſt diſtinguiſhed beauties, he is, at the ſame time, not a perfect model for Hiſtory, and ſuch as have formed themſelves upon him, have ſeldom been ſucceſsful. He is to be admired, rather than imitated. In his reflections, he is too refined; in his ſtyle, too conciſe, ſometimes quaint and affected, often abrupt and obſcure. Hiſtory ſeems to require a more natural, flowing, and popular manner.

The Antients employed one embelliſhment of Hiſtory which the Moderns have laid aſide, I mean Orations, which, on weighty occaſions, they put into the mouths of ſome of their chief perſonages.

perſonages. By means of theſe, they diverſified their hiſtory; they conveyed both moral and political inſtruction; and, by the oppoſite arguments which were employed, they gave us a view of the ſentiments of different parties. Thucydides was the firſt who introduced this method. The Orations with which his Hiſtory abounds, and thoſe too of ſome other Greek and Latin Hiſtorians, are among the moſt valuable remains which we have of Antient Eloquence. How beautiful ſoever they are, it may be much queſtioned, I think, whether they find a proper place in Hiſtory. I am rather inclined to think, that they are unſuitable to it. For they form a mixture which is unnatural in Hiſtory, or fiction with truth. We know, that theſe Orations are entirely of the Author's own compoſition, and that he has introduced ſome celebrated perſon haranguing in a public place, purely that he might have an opportunity of ſhowing his own eloquence, or delivering his own ſentiments, under the name of that perſon. This is a ſort of poetical liberty which does not ſuit the gravity of Hiſtory, throughout which, an air of the ſtricteſt truth ſhould always reign. Orations may be an embelliſhment to Hiſtory; ſuch might alſo Poetical Compoſitions be, introduced under the name of ſome of the perſonages mentioned in the Narration, who were known to have poſſeſſed poetical talents. But

LECT. XXXVI.

LECT. XXXVI.

neither the one, nor the other, finds a proper place in Hiſtory. Inſtead of inſerting formal Orations, the method adopted by later Writers ſeems better and more natural; that of the Hiſtorian, on ſome great occaſion, delivering, in his own perſon, the ſentiments and reaſonings of the oppoſite parties, or the ſubſtance of what was underſtood to be ſpoken in ſome Public Aſſembly; which he may do without the liberty of fiction.

THE drawing of characters is one of the moſt ſplendid, and, at the ſame time, one of the moſt difficult ornaments of Hiſtorical Compoſition. For characters are generally conſidered, as profeſſed exhibitions of fine writing; and an Hiſtorian, who ſeeks to ſhine in them, is frequently in danger of carrying refinement to exceſs, from a deſire of appearing very profound and penetrating. He brings together ſo many contraſts, and ſubtile oppoſitions of qualities, that we are rather dazzled with ſparkling expreſſions, than entertained with any clear conception of a human character. A Writer who would characteriſe in an inſtructive and maſterly manner, ſhould be ſimple in his ſtyle, and ſhould avoid all quaintneſs and affectation; at the ſame time, not contenting himſelf with giving us general outlines only, but deſcending into thoſe peculiarities which mark a character, in its moſt

ſtrong

LECT. XXXVI.

ſtrong and diſtinctive features. The Greek Hiſtorians ſometimes give elogiums, but rarely draw full and profeſſed characters. The two Antient Authors who have laboured this part of Hiſtorical Compoſition moſt, are Salluſt and Tacitus.

As Hiſtory is a ſpecies of Writing deſigned for the inſtruction of mankind, ſound morality ſhould always reign in it. Both in deſcribing characters, and in relating tranſactions, the Author ſhould always ſhow himſelf to be on the ſide of virtue. To deliver moral inſtruction in a formal manner, falls not within his province; but both as a good man, and as a good Writer, we expect, that he ſhould diſcover ſentiments of reſpect for virtue, and of indignation at flagrant vice. To appear neutral and indifferent with reſpect to good and bad characters, and to affect a crafty and political, rather than a moral turn of thought, will, beſides other bad effects, derogate greatly from the weight of Hiſtorical Compoſition, and will render the ſtrain of it much more cold and unintereſting. We are always moſt intereſted in the tranſactions which are going on, when our ſympathy is awakened by the ſtory, and when we become engaged in the fate of the actors. But this effect can never be produced by a Writer, who is deficient in ſenſibility and moral feeling.

As

LECT. XXXVI.

As the obſervations which I have hitherto made, have moſtly reſpected the Antient Hiſtorians, it may naturally be expected, that I ſhould alſo take ſome notice of the Moderns who have excelled in this kind of Writing.

The country in Europe, where the Hiſtorical Genius has, in latter ages, ſhone forth with moſt luſtre, beyond doubt, is Italy. The national character of the Italians ſeems favourable to it. They were always diſtinguiſhed as an acute, penetrating, reflecting people, remarkable for political ſagacity and wiſdom, and who early addicted themſelves to the arts of Writing. Accordingly, ſoon after the reſtoration of letters, Machiavel, Guicciardin, Davila, Bentivoglio, Father Paul, became highly conſpicuous for hiſtorical merit. They all appear to have conceived very juſt ideas of Hiſtory; and are agreeable, inſtructive, and intereſting Writers. In their manner of narration, they are formed upon the Antients; ſome of them, as Bentivoglio and Guicciardin, have, in imitation of them, introduced Orations into their Hiſtory. In the profoundneſs and diſtinctneſs of their political views, they may, perhaps, be eſteemed to have ſurpaſſed the Antients. Critics have, at the ſame time, obſerved ſome imperfections in each of them. Machiavel, in his Hiſtory of Florence, is not altogether

altogether ſo intereſting as one would expect an Author of his abilities to be; either through his own defect, or through ſome unhappineſs in his ſubject, which led him into a very minute detail of the intrigues of one city. Guicciardin, at all times ſenſible and profound, is taxed for dwelling ſo long on the Tuſcan affairs as to be ſometimes tedious; a defect which is alſo imputed, occaſionally, to the judicious Father Paul. Bentivoglio, in his excellent Hiſtory of the wars of Flanders, is accuſed for approaching to the florid and pompous manner: And Davila, though one of the moſt agreeable and entertaining Relaters, has manifeſtly this defect, of ſpreading a ſort of uniformity over all his characters, by repreſenting them as guided too regularly by political intereſt. But, although ſome ſuch objections may be made to theſe Authors, they deſerve, upon the whole, to be placed in the firſt rank of Modern Hiſtorical Writers. The wars of Flanders, written in Latin by Famianus Strada, is a book of ſome note; but is not entitled to the ſame reputation as the works of the other Hiſtorians I have named. Strada is too violently partial to the Spaniſh cauſe; and too open a Panegyriſt of the Prince of Parma. He is florid, diffuſe, and an affected imitator of the manner and ſtyle of Livy.

LECT XXXVI.

LECT. XXXVI.

AMONG the French, as there has been much good Writing in many kinds, ſo alſo in the Hiſtorical. That ingenious nation, who have done ſo much honour to Modern Literature, poſſeſs, in an eminent degree, the talent of Narration. Many of their later Hiſtorical Writers are ſpirited, lively, and agreeable; and ſome of them not deficient in profoundneſs and penetration. They have not, however, produced any ſuch capital Hiſtorians as the Italians, whom I mentioned above.

OUR Iſland, till within theſe few years, was not eminent for its hiſtorical productions. Early, indeed, Scotland acquired reputation by means of the celebrated Buchanan. He is an elegant Writer, claſſical in his Latinity, and agreeable both in narration and deſcription. But one cannot but ſuſpect him to be more attentive to elegance, than to accuracy. Accuſtomed to form his political notions wholly upon the plans of antient governments, the feudal ſyſtem ſeems never to have entered into his thoughts; and as this was the baſis of the Scottiſh conſtitution, his political views are, of courſe, inaccurate and imperfect. When he comes to the tranſactions of his own time, there is ſuch a change in his manner of writing, and ſuch an aſperity in his ſtyle, that, on what ſide ſoever the truth lies with regard to thoſe dubious and long controverted facts

facts which make the ſubject of that part of his work, it is impoſſible to clear him from being deeply tinctured with the ſpirit of party.

Among the older Engliſh Hiſtorians, the moſt conſiderable is Lord Clarendon. Though he writes as the profeſſed apologiſt of one ſide, yet there appears more impartiality in his relation of facts, than might at firſt be expected. A great ſpirit of virtue and probity runs through his work. He maintains all the dignity of an Hiſtorian. His ſentences, indeed, are often too long, and his general manner is prolix; but his ſtyle, on the whole, is manly; and his merit, as an Hiſtorian, is much beyond mediocrity. Biſhop Burnet is lively and perſpicuous; but he has hardly any other hiſtorical merit. His ſtyle is too careleſs and familiar for Hiſtory; his characters are, indeed, marked with a bold and a ſtrong hand; but they are generally light and ſatirical; and he abounds ſo much in little ſtories concerning himſelf, that he reſembles more a Writer of Memoirs than of Hiſtory. During a long period, Engliſh Hiſtorical Authors ſeemed to aim at nothing higher than an exact relation of facts; till of late the diſtinguiſhed names of Hume, Robertſon, and Gibbon, have raiſed the Britiſh character, in this ſpecies of Writing, to high reputation and dignity.

LECT. XXXVI.

I OBSERVED, in the preceding Lecture, that Annals, Memoirs, and Lives, are the inferior kinds of Hiſtorical Compoſition. It will be proper, before diſmiſſing this ſubject, to make a few obſervations upon them. Annals are commonly underſtood to ſignify a collection of facts, digeſted according to chronological order; rather ſerving for the materials of Hiſtory, than aſpiring to the name of Hiſtory themſelves. All that is required, therefore, in a Writer of ſuch Annals, is to be faithful, diſtinct, and complete.

MEMOIRS denote a ſort of Compoſition, in which an Author does not pretend to give full information of all the facts reſpecting the period of which he writes, but only to relate what he himſelf had acceſs to know, or what he was concerned in, or what illuſtrates the conduct of ſome perſon, or the circumſtances of ſome tranſaction, which he chooſes for his ſubject. From a Writer of Memoirs, therefore, is not expected the ſame profound reſearch, or enlarged information, as from a Writer of Hiſtory. He is not ſubject to the ſame laws of unvarying dignity and gravity. He may talk freely of himſelf; he may deſcend into the moſt familiar anecdotes. What is chiefly required of him is, that he be ſprightly and intereſting; and eſpecially, that he inform us of things that are uſeful and curious; that he

LECT. XXXVI.

he convey to us ſome ſort of knowledge worth the acquiring. This is a ſpecies of Writing very bewitching to ſuch as love to write concerning themſelves, and conceive every tranſaction, in which they had a ſhare, to be of ſingular importance. There is no wonder, therefore, that a nation ſo ſprightly as the French, ſhould, for two centuries paſt, have been pouring forth a whole flood of Memoirs; the greateſt part of which are little more than agreeable trifles.

Some, however, muſt be excepted from this general character; two in particular; the Memoirs of the Cardinal de Retz, and thoſe of the Duke of Sully. From Retz's Memoirs, beſides the pleaſure of agreeable and lively narration, we may derive alſo much inſtruction, and much knowledge of human nature. Though his politics be often too fine ſpun, yet the Memoirs of a profeſſed factious leader, ſuch as the Cardinal was, wherein he draws both his own character, and that of ſeveral great perſonages of his time, ſo fully, cannot be read by any perſon of good ſenſe without benefit. The Memoirs of the Duke of Sully, in the ſtate in which they are now given to the Public, have great merit, and deſerve to be mentioned with particular praiſe. No Memoirs approach more nearly to the uſefulneſs, and the dignity of a full legitimate Hiſtory. They have this

LECT. XXXVI.

peculiar advantage, of giving us a beautiful diſplay of two of the moſt illuſtrious characters which hiſtory preſents; Sully himſelf, one of the ableſt and moſt incorrupt miniſters, and Henry IV. one of the greateſt and moſt amiable Princes of modern times. I know few books more full of virtue, and of good ſenſe, than Sully's Memoirs; few, therefore, more proper to form both the heads and the hearts of ſuch as are deſigned for public buſineſs, and action, in the world.

BIOGRAPHY, or the Writing of Lives, is a very uſeful kind of Compoſition; leſs formal and ſtately than Hiſtory; but to the bulk of Readers, perhaps, no leſs inſtructive; as it affords them the opportunity of ſeeing the characters and tempers, the virtues and failings of eminent men fully diſplayed; and admits them into a more thorough and intimate acquaintance with ſuch perſons, than Hiſtory generally allows. For a Writer of Lives may deſcend, with propriety, to minute circumſtances, and familiar incidents. It is expected of him, that he is to give the private, as well as the public life, of the perſon whoſe actions he records; nay, it is from private life, from familiar, domeſtic, and ſeemingly trivial occurrences, that we often receive moſt light into the real character. In this ſpecies of Writing, Plutarch has no ſmall merit; and to him

him we ſtand indebted for much of the knowledge that we poſſeſs, concerning ſeveral of the moſt eminent perſonages of antiquity. His matter is, indeed, better than his manner; as he cannot lay claim to any peculiar beauty or elegance. His judgment too, and his accuracy, have ſometimes been taxed; but whatever defects of this kind he may be liable to, his Lives of Eminent Men will always be conſidered as a valuable treaſure of inſtruction. He is remarkable for being one of the moſt humane Writers of all antiquity; leſs dazzled than many of them are, with the exploits of valour and ambition; and fond of diſplaying his great men to us, in the more gentle lights of retirement and private life.

I CANNOT conclude the ſubject of Hiſtory, without taking notice of a very great improvement which has, of late years, begun to be introduced into Hiſtorical Compoſition; I mean, a more particular attention than was formerly given to laws, cuſtoms, commerce, religion, literature, and every other thing that tends to ſhow the ſpirit and genius of nations. It is now underſtood to be the buſineſs of an able Hiſtorian to exhibit manners, as well as facts and events; and aſſuredly, whatever diſplays the ſtate and life of mankind, in different periods, and illuſtrates the progreſs of the human mind, is more uſeful and intereſt-

LECT. XXXVI.

ing than the detail of ſieges and battles. The perſon, to whom we are moſt indebted for the introduction of this improvement into Hiſtory, is the celebrated M. Voltaire, whoſe genius has ſhone with ſuch ſurpriſing luſtre, in ſo many different parts of literature. His Age of Louis XIV. was one of the firſt great productions in this taſte; and ſoon drew, throughout all Europe, that general attention, and received that high approbation, which ſo ingenious and eloquent a production merited. His Eſſay on the general Hiſtory of Europe, ſince the days of Charlemagne, is not to be conſidered either as a Hiſtory, or the proper Plan of an Hiſtorical Work; but only as a ſeries of obſervations on the chief events that have happened throughout ſeveral centuries, and on the changes that ſucceſſively took place in the ſpirit and manners of different nations. Though, in ſome dates and facts, it may, perhaps, be inaccurate, and is tinged with thoſe particularities which unhappily diſtinguiſh Voltaire's manner of thinking on religious ſubjects, yet it contains ſo many enlarged and inſtructive views, as juſtly to merit the attention of all who either read or write the Hiſtory of thoſe ages.

LECTURE XXXVII.

PHILOSOPHICAL WRITING—DIALOGUE—EPISTOLARY WRITING—FICTITIOUS HISTORY.

LECT. XXXVII.

AS Hiſtory is both a very dignified ſpecies of Compoſition, and by the regular form which it aſſumes, falls directly under the laws of Criticiſm, I diſcourſed of it fully in the two preceding Lectures. The remaining ſpecies of Compoſition, in Proſe, afford leſs room for critical obſervation.

PHILOSOPHICAL Writing, for inſtance, will not lead us into any long diſcuſſion. As the profeſſed object of Philoſophy is to convey inſtruction, and as they who ſtudy it are ſuppoſed to do ſo for inſtruction, not for entertainment, the ſtyle, the form, and dreſs of ſuch Writings, are leſs material objects. They are objects, however, that muſt not be wholly neglected. He who attempts to inſtruct mankind, without ſtudying, at the ſame time, to engage their attention, and to intereſt them in his ſubject by his manner of exhibiting it,

LECT. XXXVII.

is not likely to prove ſucceſsful. The ſame truths, and reaſonings, delivered in a dry and cold manner, or with a proper meaſure of elegance and beauty, will make very different impreſſions on the minds of men.

It is manifeſt, that every Philoſophical Writer muſt ſtudy the utmoſt perſpicuity: and, by reflecting on what was formerly delivered on the ſubject of perſpicuity, with reſpect both to ſingle words, and the conſtruction of Sentences, we may be convinced that this is a ſtudy which demands conſiderable attention to the rules of Style and good Writing. Beyond mere perſpicuity, ſtrict accuracy and preciſion are required in a Philoſophical Writer. He muſt employ no words of uncertain meaning, no looſe nor indeterminate expreſſions; and ſhould avoid uſing words which are ſeemingly ſynonymous, without carefully attending to the variation which they make upon the idea.

To be clear then and preciſe, is one requiſite which we have a title to demand from every Philoſophical Writer. He may poſſeſs this quality, and be at the ſame time a very dry Writer. He ſhould therefore ſtudy ſome degree of embelliſhment, in order to render his Compoſition pleaſing and graceful. One of the moſt agreeable, and one of the moſt uſeful embelliſhments which a Philoſopher can em-

ploy, consists in illustrations taken from historical facts, and the characters of men. All moral and political subjects naturally afford scope for these; and wherever there is room for employing them, they seldom fail of producing a happy effect. They diversify the Composition; they relieve the mind from the fatigue of mere reasoning, and at the same time raise more full conviction than any reasonings produce: for they take Philosophy out of the abstract, and give weight to Speculation, by shewing its connection with real life, and the actions of mankind.

Philosophical Writing admits besides of a polished, a neat, and elegant Style. It admits of Metaphors, Comparisons, and all the calm Figures of Speech, by which an Author may convey his sense to the understanding with clearness and force, at the same time that he entertains the imagination. He must take great care, however, that all his ornaments be of the chastest kind, never partaking of the florid or the tumid; which is so unpardonable in a professed Philosopher, that it is much better for him to err on the side of naked simplicity, than on that of too much ornament. Some of the Antients, as Plato and Cicero, have left us Philosophical Treatises composed with much elegance and beauty. Seneca has been long and justly censured for the affectation that appears in his Style. He is too fond of

LECT. XXXVII.

of a certain brilliant and ſparkling manner; of antitheſes and quaint ſentences. It cannot be denied, at the ſame time, that he often expreſſes himſelf with much livelineſs and force; though his Style, upon the whole, is far from deſerving imitation. In Engliſh, Mr. Locke's celebrated Treatiſe on Human Underſtanding, may be pointed out as a model, on the one hand, of the greateſt clearneſs and diſtinctneſs of Philoſophical Style, with very little approach to ornament: Lord Shaftſbury's Writings, on the other hand, exhibit Philoſophy dreſſed up with all the ornament which it can admit; perhaps with more than is perfectly ſuited to it.

PHILOSOPHICAL Compoſition ſometimes aſſumes a form, under which it mingles more with works of taſte, when carried on in the way of Dialogue and Converſation. Under this form the Antients have given us ſome of their chief Philoſophical Works; and ſeveral of the Moderns have endeavoured to imitate them. Dialogue Writing may be executed in two ways, either as direct converſation, where none but the Speakers appear, which is the method that Plato uſes; or as the recital of a converſation, where the Author himſelf appears, and gives an account of what paſſed in diſcourſe; which is the method that Cicero generally follows. But though thoſe different methods make ſome variation in the form, yet the nature of the Compo-

Compoſition is at bottom the ſame in both, and ſubject to the ſame laws. LECT. XXXVII.

A DIALOGUE, in one or other of theſe forms, on ſome philoſophical, moral, or critical ſubject, when it is well conducted, ſtands in a high rank among the Works of Taſte; but is much more difficult in the execution than is commonly imagined. For it requires more, than merely the introduction of different perſons ſpeaking in ſucceſſion. It ought to be a natural and ſpirited repreſentation of real converſation; exhibiting the character and manners of the ſeveral Speakers, and ſuiting to the character of each, that peculiarity of thought and expreſſion which diſtinguiſhes him from another. A Dialogue, thus conducted, gives the Reader a very agreeable entertainment; as by means of the debate going on among the perſonages, he receives a fair and full view of both ſides of the argument; and is, at the ſame time, amuſed with polite converſation, and with a diſplay of conſiſtent and well ſupported characters. An Author, therefore, who has genius for executing ſuch a Compoſition after this manner, has it in his power both to inſtruct and to pleaſe.

BUT the greateſt part of Modern Dialogue Writers have no idea of any Compoſition of this

LECT. XXXVII.

this ſort; and bating the outward forms of converſation, and that one ſpeaks, and another anſwers, it is quite the ſame as if the Author ſpoke in perſon throughout the whole. He ſets up a Philotheos, perhaps, and a Philatheos, or an A and a B; who, after mutual compliments, and after admiring the fineneſs of the morning or evening, and the beauty of the proſpects around them, enter into conference concerning ſome grave matter; and all that we know farther of them is, that the one perſonates the Author, a man of learning, no doubt, and of good principles; and the other is a man of ſtraw, ſet up to propoſe ſome trivial objections; over which the firſt gains a moſt entire triumph, and leaves his ſceptical antagoniſt at the end much humbled, and, generally, convinced of his error. This is a very frigid and inſipid manner of writing; the more ſo, as it is an attempt toward ſomething, which we ſee the Author cannot ſupport. It is the form, without the ſpirit of converſation. The Dialogue ſerves no purpoſe, but to make awkward interruptions; and we ſhould with more patience hear the Author continuing always to reaſon himſelf, and to remove the objections that are made to his principles, than be troubled with the unmeaning appearance of two perſons, whom we ſee to be in reality no more than one.

LECT. XXXVII.

AMONG the Antients, Plato is eminent for the beauty of his Dialogues. The ſcenery, and the circumſtances of many of them, are beautifully painted. The characters of the Sophiſts, with whom Socrates diſputed, are well drawn; a variety of perſonages are exhibited to us; we are introduced into a real converſation, often ſupported with much life and ſpirit, after the Socratic manner. For richneſs and beauty of imagination, no Philoſophic Writer, Antient or Modern, is comparable to Plato. The only fault of his imagination is, ſuch an exceſs of fertility as allows it ſometimes to obſcure his judgment. It frequently carries him into Allegory, Fiction, Enthuſiaſm, and the airy regions of Myſtical Theology. The Philoſopher is, at times, loſt in the Poet. But whether we be edified with the matter or not, (and much edification he often affords), we are always entertained with the manner; and left with a ſtrong impreſſion of the ſublimity of the Author's genius.

CICERO's Dialogues, or thoſe recitals of converſation, which he has introduced into ſeveral of his Philoſophical and Critical Works, are not ſo ſpirited, nor ſo characteriſtical, as thoſe of Plato. Yet ſome, as that "De Oratore" eſpecially, are agreeable and well ſupported. They ſhow us converſation carried on among ſome of the principal perſons of

LECT. XXXVII.

of antient Rome, with freedom, good breeding, and dignity. The Author of the elegant Dialogue "De Cauſis Corruptæ Eloquentiæ," which is annexed ſometimes to the works of Quinctilian, and ſometimes to thoſe of Tacitus, has happily imitated, perhaps has excelled Cicero, in this manner of writing.

LUCIAN is a Dialogue Writer of much eminence; though his ſubjects are ſeldom ſuch as can entitle him to be ranked among Philoſophical Authors. He has given the model of the light and humourous Dialogue, and has carried it to great perfection. A character of levity, and at the ſame time of wit and penetration, diſtinguiſhes all his writings. His great object was, to expoſe the follies of ſuperſtition, and the pedantry of Philoſophy, which prevailed in his age; and he could not have taken any more ſucceſsful method for this end, than what he has employed in his Dialogues, eſpecially in thoſe of the Gods and of the Dead, which are full of pleaſantry and ſatire. In this invention of Dialogues of the Dead, he has been followed by ſeveral Modern Authors. Fontenelle, in particular, has given us Dialogues of this ſort, which are ſprightly and agreeable; but as for characters, whoever his perſonages be, they all become Frenchmen in his hands. Indeed few things in Compoſition are more difficult, than

in

LECT. XXXVII.

in the courſe of a Moral Dialogue to exhibit characters properly diſtinguiſhed; as calm converſation furniſhes none of thoſe aſſiſtances for bringing characters into light, which the active ſcenes, and intereſting ſituations of the Drama, afford. Hence few Authors are eminent for Characteriſtical Dialogue on grave ſubjects. One of the moſt remarkable in the Engliſh language, is a Writer of the laſt age, Dr. Henry More, in his Divine Dialogues, relating to the foundations of Natural Religion. Though his Style be now in ſome meaſure obſolete, and his Speakers be marked with the academic ſtiffneſs of thoſe times, yet the Dialogue is animated by a variety of Character, and a ſprightlineſs of Converſation, beyond what are commonly met with in Writings of this kind. Biſhop Berkeley's Dialogues concerning the exiſtence of matter, do not attempt any diſplay of Characters; but furniſh an inſtance of a very abſtract ſubject, rendered clear and intelligible by means of Converſation properly managed.

I PROCEED next to make ſome obſervations on Epiſtolary Writing; which poſſeſſes a kind of middle place between the ſerious and amuſing ſpecies of Compoſition. Epiſtolary Writing appears, at firſt view, to ſtretch into a very wide field. For there is no ſubject whatever, on which one may not convey his

LECT. XXXVII.

thoughts to the Public, in the form of a Letter. Lord Shaftſbury, for inſtance, Mr. Harris, and ſeveral other Writers, have choſen to give this form to philoſophical treatiſes. But this is not ſufficient to claſs ſuch treatiſes under the head of Epiſtolary Compoſition. Though they bear, in the title-page, a Letter to a Friend, after the firſt addreſs, the Friend diſappears, and we ſee, that it is, in truth, the Public with whom the Author correſponds. Seneca's Epiſtles are of this ſort. There is no probability that they ever paſſed in correſpondence, as real letters. They are no other than miſcellaneous diſſertations on moral ſubjects; which the Author, for his convenience, choſe to put into the epiſtolary form. Even where one writes a real letter on ſome formal topic, as of moral or religious conſolation to a perſon under diſtreſs, ſuch as Sir William Temple has written to the Counteſs of Eſſex on the death of her daughter, he is at liberty, on ſuch occaſions, to write wholly as a Divine or as a Philoſopher, and to aſſume the ſtyle and manner of one, without reprehenſion. We conſider the Author not as writing a Letter, but as compoſing a Diſcourſe, ſuited particularly to the circumſtances of ſome one perſon.

Epistolary Writing becomes a diſtinct ſpecies of Compoſition, ſubject to the cognizance of Criticiſm, only or chiefly, when it is

of

LECT XXXVII.

of the eaſy and familiar kind; when it is converſation carried on upon paper, between two friends at a diſtance. Such an intercourſe, when well conducted, may be rendered very agreeable to Readers of taſte. If the ſubject of the Letters be important, they will be the more valuable. Even though there ſhould be nothing very conſiderable in the ſubject, yet if the ſpirit and turn of the correſpondence be agreeable; if they be written in a ſprightly manner, and with native grace and eaſe, they may ſtill be entertaining; more eſpecially if there be any thing to intereſt us, in the characters of thoſe who write them. Hence the curioſity which the Public has always diſcovered, concerning the Letters of eminent perſons. We expect in them to diſcover ſomewhat of their real character. It is childiſh indeed to expect, that in Letters we are to find the whole heart of the Author unveiled. Concealment and diſguiſe take place, more or leſs, in all human intercourſe. But ſtill, as Letters from one friend to another make the neareſt approach to converſation, we may expect to ſee more of a character diſplayed in theſe than in other productions, which are ſtudied for public view. We pleaſe ourſelves with beholding the Writer in a ſituation which allows him to be at his eaſe, and to give vent occaſionally to the overflowings of his heart.

LECT. XXXVII.

MUCH, therefore, of the merit, and the agreeableneſs of Epiſtolary Writing, will depend on its introducing us into ſome acquaintance with the Writer. There, if any where, we look for the man, not for the Author. Its firſt and fundamental requiſite is, to be natural and ſimple; for a ſtiff and laboured manner is as bad in a Letter, as it is in Converſation. This does not baniſh ſprightlineſs and wit. Theſe are graceful in Letters, juſt as they are in converſation; when they flow eaſily, and without being ſtudied; when employed ſo as to ſeaſon, not to cloy. One who, either in Converſation or in Letters, affects to ſhine and to ſparkle always, will not pleaſe long. The ſtyle of Letters ſhould not be too highly poliſhed. It ought to be neat and correct, but no more. All nicety about words, betrays ſtudy; and hence muſical periods, and appearances of number and harmony in arrangement, ſhould be carefully avoided in Letters. The beſt Letters, are commonly ſuch as the Authors have written with moſt facility. What the heart or the imagination dictates, always flows readily; but where there is no ſubject to warm or intereſt theſe, conſtraint appears; and hence, thoſe Letters of mere compliment, congratulation, or affected condolance, which have coſt the Authors moſt labour in compoſing, and which, for that reaſon, they perhaps conſider as their maſter-pieces, never fail

of being the moſt diſagreeable and inſipid to the Readers.

It ought, at the ſame time, to be remembered, that the eaſe and ſimplicity which I have recommended in Epiſtolary Correſpondence, are not to be underſtood as importing entire careleſſneſs. In writing to the moſt intimate friend, a certain degree of attention, both to the ſubject and the ſtyle, is requiſite and becoming. It is no more than what we owe both to ourſelves, and to the friend with whom we correſpond. A ſlovenly and negligent manner of Writing, is a diſobliging mark of want of reſpect. The liberty, beſides, of writing Letters with too careleſs a hand, is apt to betray perſons into imprudence in what they write. The firſt requiſite, both in converſation and correſpondence, is to attend to all the proper decorums which our own character, and that of others, demand. An imprudent expreſſion in converſation may be forgotten and paſs away; but when we take the pen into our hand, we muſt remember, that "Litera ſcripta manet."

Pliny's Letters are one of the moſt celebrated collections which the Antients have given us, in the epiſtolary way. They are elegant and polite; and exhibit a very

LECT. XXXVII.

pleaſing and amiable view of the Author. But, according to the vulgar phraſe, they ſmell too much of the lamp. They are too elegant and fine; and it is not eaſy to avoid thinking, that the Author is caſting an eye towards the Public, when he is appearing to write only for his friends. Nothing indeed is more difficult, than for an Author, who publiſhes his own Letters, to diveſt himſelf altogether of attention to the opinion of the world in what he ſays; by which means, he becomes much leſs agreeable than a man of parts would be, if, without any conſtraint of this ſort, he were writing to his intimate friend.

CICERO's Epiſtles, though not ſo ſhowy as thoſe of Pliny, are, on ſeveral accounts, a far more valuable collection; indeed, the moſt valuable collection of Letters extant in any language. They are Letters of real buſineſs, written to the greateſt men of the age, compoſed with purity and elegance, but without the leaſt affectation; and, what adds greatly to their merit, written without any intention of being publiſhed to the world. For it appears, that Cicero never kept copies of his own Letters; and we are wholly indebted to the care of his freed-man Tyro, for the large collection that was made, after his death, of thoſe which are now extant, amounting to near

a thouſand*. They contain the moſt authentic materials of the hiſtory of that age; and are the laſt monuments which remain of Rome in its free ſtate; the greateſt part of them being written during that important criſis, when the Republic was on the point of ruin; the moſt intereſting ſituation, perhaps, which is to be found in the affairs of mankind. To his intimate friends, eſpecially to Atticus, Cicero lays open himſelf and his heart, with entire freedom. In the courſe of his correſpondence with others, we are introduced into acquaintance with ſeveral of the principal perſonages of Rome; and it is remarkable that moſt of Cicero's correſpondents, as well as himſelf, are elegant and polite Writers; which ſerves to heighten our idea of the taſte and manners of that age.

The moſt diſtinguiſhed Collection of Letters in the Engliſh Language, is that of Mr. Pope, Dean Swift, and their friends; partly publiſhed in Mr. Pope's Works, and partly in thoſe of Dean Swift. This Collection is, on the whole, an entertaining and agreeable one;

* See his Letter to Atticus, which was written a year or two before his death, in which he tells him, in anſwer to ſome enquiries concerning his Epiſtles, that he had no collection of them, and that Tyro had only about ſeventy of them. Ad Att. 16. 5.

LECT. XXXVII.

and contains much wit and ingenuity. It is not, however, altogether free from the fault which I imputed to Pliny's Epiſtles, of too much ſtudy and refinement. In the variety of Letters from different perſons, contained in that Collection, we find many that are written with eaſe, and a beautiful ſimplicity. Thoſe of Dr. Arbuthnot, in particular, always deſerve that praiſe. Dean Swift's alſo are unaffected; and as a proof of their being ſo, they exhibit his character fully, with all its defects; though it were to be wiſhed, for the honour of his memory, that his Epiſtolary Correſpondence had not been drained to the dregs, by ſo many ſucceſſive publications, as have been given to the world. Several of Lord Bolingbroke's, and of Biſhop Atterbury's Letters, are maſterly. The cenſure of writing Letters in too artificial a manner, falls heavieſt on Mr. Pope himſelf. There is viſibly more ſtudy, and leſs of nature and the heart in his Letters, than in thoſe of ſome of his correſpondents. He had formed himſelf on the manner of Voiture, and is too fond of writing like a wit. His Letters to Ladies are full of affectation. Even in writing to his friends, how forced an Introduction is the following of a Letter to Mr. Addiſon: "I am more joyed "at your return, than I ſhould be at that of "the Sun, as much as I wiſh for him in this "melancholy wet ſeaſon; but it is his fate "too,

"too, like yours, to be diſpleaſing to owls "and obſcene animals, who cannot bear his "luſtre." How ſtiff a compliment is it, which he pays to Biſhop Atterbury? "Though "the noiſe and daily buſtle for the Public be "now over, I dare ſay, you are ſtill tender- "ing its welfare; as the Sun in winter, when "ſeeming to retire from the world, is pre- "paring warmth and benedictions for a better "ſeaſon." This ſentence might be tolerated in a harangue; but is very unſuitable to the Style of one friend correſponding with another.

The gaiety and vivacity of the French genius appear to much advantage in their Letters, and have given birth to ſeveral agreeable publications. In the laſt age, Balzac and Voiture were the two moſt celebrated Epiſtolary Writers. Balzac's reputation indeed ſoon declined, on account of his ſwelling periods and pompous Style. But Voiture continued long a favourite Author. His Compoſition is extremely ſparkling; he ſhows a great deal of wit, and can trifle in the moſt entertaining manner. His only fault is, that he is too open and profeſſed a wit, to be thoroughly agreeable as a Letter Writer. The Letters of Madam de Sevignè, are now eſteemed the moſt accompliſhed model of a familiar correſpondence. They turn indeed very much upon

LECT. XXXVII.

upon trifles, the incidents of the day, and the news of the town; and they are overloaded with extravagant compliments, and expreſſions of fondneſs, to her favourite daughter; but withal, they ſhow ſuch perpetual ſprightlineſs, they contain ſuch eaſy and varied narration, and ſo many ſtrokes of the moſt lively and beautiful painting, perfectly free from any affectation, that they are juſtly intitled to high praiſe. The Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montague are not unworthy of being named after thoſe of Mad. de Sevigné. They have much of the French eaſe and vivacity; and retain more the character of agreeable Epiſtolary Style, than perhaps any Letters which have appeared in the Engliſh language.

THERE remains to be treated of, another ſpecies of Compoſition in proſe, which comprehends a very numerous, though, in general, a very inſignificant claſs of Writings, known by the name of Romances and Novels. Theſe may, at firſt view, ſeem too inſignificant, to deſerve that any particular notice ſhould be taken of them. But I cannot be of this opinion. Mr. Fletcher of Salton, in one of his Tracts, quotes it as the ſaying of a wiſe man, that give him the making of all the ballads of a nation, he would allow any one that pleaſed to make their laws. The ſaying was founded on reflection and good ſenſe, and is

appli-

LECT. XXXVII.

applicable to the ſubject now before us. For any kind of Writing, how trifling ſoever in appearance, that obtains a general currency, and eſpecially that early pre-occupies the imagination of the youth of both ſexes, muſt demand particular attention. Its influence is likely to be conſiderable, both on the morals and taſte of a nation.

In fact, fictitious hiſtories might be employed for very uſeful purpoſes. They furniſh one of the beſt channels for conveying inſtruction, for painting human life and manners, for ſhowing the errors into which we are betrayed by our paſſions, for rendering virtue amiable and vice odious. The effect of well contrived ſtories, towards accompliſhing theſe purpoſes, is ſtronger than any effect that can be produced by ſimple and naked inſtruction; and hence we find, that the wiſeſt men in all ages have more or leſs employed fables and fictions, as the vehicles of knowledge. Theſe have ever been the baſis of both Epic and Dramatic Poetry. It is not, therefore, the nature of this ſort of Writing, conſidered in itſelf, but the faulty manner of its execution, that can expoſe it to any contempt. Lord Bacon takes notice of our taſte for fictitious hiſtory, as a proof of the greatneſs and dignity of the human mind. He obſerves very ingeniouſly, that the objects of this world, and the common

LECT. XXXVII.

common train of affairs which we behold going on in it, do not fill the mind, nor give it entire ſatisfaction. We ſeek for ſomething that ſhall expand the mind in a greater degree: we ſeek for more heroic and illuſtrious deeds, for more diverſified and ſurpriſing events, for a more ſplendid order of things, a more regular and juſt diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments than what we find here: becauſe we meet not with theſe in true hiſtory, we have recourſe to fictitious. We create worlds according to our fancy, in order to gratify our capacious deſires: "Accomodando," ſays that great philoſopher, "rerum ſimulachra "ad animi deſideria, non ſubmittendo ani-"mum rebus, quod ratio facit, et hiſtoria *." Let us then, ſince the ſubject wants neither dignity nor uſe, make a few obſervations on the riſe and progreſs of Fictitious Hiſtory, and the different forms it has aſſumed in different countries.

In all countries we find its origin very antient. The genius of the Eaſtern nations, in particular, was from the earlieſt times much turned towards invention, and the love of fiction. Their Divinity, their Philoſophy, and their Politics, were clothed in fables and

* "Accommodating the appearances of things to the "deſires of the mind, not bringing down the mind, as "hiſtory and philoſophy do, to the courſe of events."

parables,

LECT. XXXVII.

parables. The Indians, the Perſians, and Arabians, were all famous for their tales. The "Arabian Night's Entertainments" are the production of a romantic invention, but of a rich and amuſing imagination; exhibiting a ſingular and curious diſplay of manners and characters, and beautified with a very humane morality. Among the antient Greeks, we hear of the Ionian and Mileſian Tales; but they have now periſhed, and, from any account that we have of them, appear to have been of the looſe and wanton kind. Some fictitious hiſtories yet remain, that were compoſed during the decline of the Roman Empire, by Apuleius, Achilles Tatius, and Heliodorus biſhop of Trica, in the 4th century; but none of them are conſiderable enough to merit particular criticiſm.

During the dark ages, this ſort of writing aſſumed a new and very ſingular form, and for a long while made a great figure in the world. The martial ſpirit of thoſe nations, among whom the feudal government prevailed; the eſtabliſhment of ſingle combat, as an allowed method of deciding cauſes both of juſtice and honour; the appointment of champions in the cauſe of women, who could not maintain their own rights by the ſword; together with the inſtitution of military tournaments, in which different kingdoms vied with one another, gave riſe, in thoſe times, to that marvellous ſyſtem of

LECT. XXXVII.

of chivalry, which is one of the moſt ſingular appearances in the hiſtory of mankind. Upon this were founded thoſe romances of knight-errantry, which carried an ideal chivalry to a ſtill more extravagant height than it had riſen in fact. There was diſplayed in them a new and very wonderful ſort of world, hardly bearing any reſemblance to the world in which we dwell. Not only knights ſetting forth to redreſs all manner of wrongs, but in every page, magicians, dragons, and giants, invulnerable men, winged horſes, enchanted armour, and enchanted caſtles; adventures abſolutely incredible, yet ſuited to the groſs ignorance of theſe ages, and to the legends, and ſuperſtitious notions concerning magic and necromancy, which then prevailed. This merit they had, of being writings of the highly moral and heroic kind. Their knights were patterns, not of courage merely, but of religion, generoſity, courteſy, and fidelity; and the heroines were no leſs diſtinguiſhed for modeſty, delicacy, and the utmoſt dignity of manners.

These were the firſt Compoſitions that received the name of Romances. The origin of this name is traced, by Mr. Huet the learned biſhop of Avranche, to the Provençal Troubadoures, a ſort of ſtory-tellers and bards in the county of Provençe, where there ſubſiſted ſome remains of literature and poetry. The language which prevailed in that country

was

was a mixture of Latin and Gallic, called the Roman or Romance Language; and as the ſtories of theſe Troubadoures were written in that language, hence it is ſaid the name of Romance, which we now apply to all fictitious Compoſition.

THE earlieſt of thoſe Romances is that which goes under the name of Turpin, the archbiſhop of Rheims, written in the 11th century. The ſubject is, the Atchievements of Charlemagne and his Peers, or Paladins, in driving the Saracens out of France and part of Spain; the ſame ſubject which Arioſto has taken for his celebrated poem of Orlando Furioſo, which is truly a Chivalry Romance, as extravagant as any of the reſt, but partly heroic, and partly comic, embelliſhed with the higheſt graces of poetry. The Romance of Turpin was followed by Amadis de Gaul, and many more of the ſame ſtamp. The Cruſades both furniſhed new matter, and increaſed the ſpirit for ſuch Writings; the Chriſtians againſt the Saracens made the common ground-work of them; and from the 11th to the 16th century, they continued to bewitch all Europe. In Spain, where the taſte for this ſort of writing had been moſt greedily caught, the ingenious Cervantes, in the beginning of the laſt century, contributed greatly to explode it; and the abolition of tournaments, the prohibition of ſingle combat, the diſbelief

LECT. XXXVII.

diſbelief of magic and enchantments, and the change in general of manners throughout Europe, began to give a new turn to fictitious Compoſition.

THEN appeared the Aſtræa of D'urfé, the Grand Cyrus, the Clelia and Cleopatra of Mad. Scuderi, the Arcadia of Sir Philip Sidney, and other grave and ſtately Compoſitions in the ſame ſtyle. Theſe may be conſidered as forming the ſecond ſtage of Romance Writing. The heroiſm and the gallantry, the moral and virtuous turn of the chivalry romance, were ſtill preſerved; but the dragons, the necromancers, and the enchanted caſtles, were baniſhed, and ſome ſmall reſemblance to human nature was introduced. Still, however, there was too much of the marvellous in them to pleaſe an age which now aſpired to refinement. The characters were diſcerned to be ſtrained; the ſtyle to be ſwoln; the adventures incredible: the books themſelves were voluminous and tedious.

HENCE, this ſort of Compoſition ſoon aſſumed a third form, and from magnificent Heroic Romance, dwindled down to the Familiar Novel. Theſe novels, both in France and England, during the age of Lewis XIV. and King Charles II. were in general of a trifling nature, without the appearance of moral

LECT. XXXVII.

moral tendency, or uſeful inſtruction. Since that time, however, ſomewhat better has been attempted, and a degree of reformation introduced into the ſpirit of Novel Writing. Imitations of life and character have been made their principal object. Relations have been profeſſed to be given of the behaviour of perſons in particular intereſting ſituations, ſuch as may actually occur in life; by means of which, what is laudable or defective in character and in conduct, may be pointed out, and placed in an uſeful light. Upon this plan, the French have produced ſome compoſitions of conſiderable merit. Gil Blas, by Le Sage, is a book full of good ſenſe, and inſtructive knowledge of the world. The works of Marivaux, eſpecially his Marianne, diſcover great refinement of thought, great penetration into human nature, and paint, with a very delicate pencil, ſome of the niceſt ſhades and features in the diſtinction of characters. The Nouvelle Heloiſe of Rouſſeau is a production of a very ſingular kind; in many of the events which are related, improbable and unnatural; in ſome of the details tedious, and for ſome of the ſcenes which are deſcribed juſtly blameable; but withal, for the power of eloquence, for tenderneſs of ſentiment, for ardour of paſſion, entitled to rank among the higheſt productions of Fictitious Hiſtory.

LECT. XXXVII.

In this kind of Writing we are, it muſt be confeſſed, in Great Britain, inferior to the French. We neither relate ſo agreeably, nor draw characters with ſo much delicacy; yet we are not without ſome performances which diſcover the ſtrength of the Britiſh genius. No fiction, in any language, was ever better ſupported than the Adventures of Robinſon Cruſoe. While it is carried on with that appearance of truth and ſimplicity, which takes a ſtrong hold of the imagination of all Readers, it ſuggeſts, at the ſame time, very uſeful inſtruction; by ſhowing how much the native powers of man may be exerted for ſurmounting the difficulties of any external ſituation. Mr. Fielding's Novels are highly diſtinguiſhed for their humour; a humour which, if not of the moſt refined and delicate kind, is original, and peculiar to himſelf. The characters which he draws are lively and natural, and marked with the ſtrokes of a bold pencil. The general ſcope of his ſtories is favourable to humanity and goodneſs of heart; and in Tom Jones, his greateſt work, the artful conduct of the fable, and the ſubſerviency of all the incidents to the winding up of the whole, deſerve much praiſe. The moſt moral of all our Novel Writers is Richardſon, the Author of Clariſſa, a Writer of excellent intentions, and of very conſiderable capacity

and

LECT. XXXVII.

and genius; did he not poſſeſs the unfortunate talent of ſpinning out pieces of amuſement into an immeaſurable length. The trivial performances which daily appear in public under the title of Lives, Adventures, and Hiſtories, by anonymous Authors, if they be often innocent, yet are moſt commonly inſipid; and, though in the general it ought to be admitted that Characteriſtical Novels, formed upon Nature and upon Life, without extravagance, and without licentiouſneſs, might furniſh an agreeable and uſeful entertainment to the mind; yet conſidering the manner in which theſe Writings have been, for the moſt part, conducted, it muſt alſo be confeſſed, that they oftener tend to diſſipation and idleneſs, than to any good purpoſe. Let us now therefore make our retreat from theſe regions of fiction.

LECTURE XXXVIII.

NATURE OF POETRY——ITS ORIGIN AND PROGRESS——VERSIFICATION.

LECT. XXXVIII.

I HAVE now finiſhed my obſervations on the different kinds of Writing in Proſe. What remains is, to treat of Poetical Compoſition. Before entering on the conſideration of any of its particular kinds, I deſign this Lecture as an Introduction to the ſubject of Poetry in general; wherein I ſhall treat of its nature, give an account of its origin, and make ſome obſervations on Verſification, or Poetical Numbers.

Our firſt enquiry muſt be, what is Poetry? and wherein does it differ from Proſe? The anſwer to this queſtion is not ſo eaſy as might at firſt be imagined; and Critics have differed and diſputed much, concerning the proper definition of Poetry. Some have made its eſſence to conſiſt in fiction, and ſupport their opinion by the authority of Ariſtotle and Plato. But this is certainly too limited a definition; for

LECT. XXXVIII.

for though fiction may have a great ſhare in many Poetical Compoſitions, yet many ſubjects of Poetry may not be feigned; as where the Poet deſcribes objects which actually exiſt, or pours forth the real ſentiments of his own heart. Others have made the characteriſtic of Poetry to lie in Imitation. But this is altogether looſe; for ſeveral other arts imitate as well as Poetry; and an imitation of human manners and characters, may be carried on in the humbleſt Proſe, no leſs than in the moſt lofty Poetic ſtrain.

The moſt juſt and comprehenſive definition which, I think, can be given of Poetry, is, "That it is the language of paſſion, or of en-"livened imagination, formed, moſt com-"monly, into regular numbers." The Hiſtorian, the Orator, the Philoſopher, addreſs themſelves, for the moſt part, primarily to the underſtanding: their direct aim is to inform, to perſuade, or to inſtruct. But the primary aim of a Poet is to pleaſe, and to move; and, therefore, it is to the Imagination, and the Paſſions, that he ſpeaks. He may, and he ought to have it in his view, to inſtruct, and to reform; but it is indirectly, and by pleaſing and moving, that he accompliſhes this end. His mind is ſuppoſed to be animated by ſome intereſting object which fires his Imagination, or engages his Paſſions; and which, of courſe, communicates to his Style a peculiar

LECT. XXXVIII.

liar elevation ſuited to his ideas; very different from that mode of expreſſion, which is natural to the mind in its calm, ordinary ſtate. I have added to my definition, that this language of Paſſion, or Imagination, is formed, *moſt commonly*, into regular numbers; becauſe, though Verſification be, in general, the exterior diſtinction of Poetry, yet there are ſome forms of Verſe ſo looſe and familiar, as to be hardly diſtinguiſhable from Proſe; ſuch as the Verſe of Terence's Comedies; and there is alſo a ſpecies of Proſe, ſo meaſured in its cadence, and ſo much raiſed in its tone, as to approach very near to Poetical Numbers; ſuch as the Telemachus of Fenelon; and the Engliſh Tranſlation of Oſſian. The truth is, Verſe and Proſe, on ſome occaſions, run into one another, like light and ſhade. It is hardly poſſible to determine the exact limit where Eloquence ends, and Poetry begins; nor is there any occaſion for being very preciſe about the boundaries, as long as the nature of each is underſtood. Theſe are the minutiæ of Criticiſm, concerning which, frivolous Writers are always diſpoſed to ſquabble; but which deſerve not any particular diſcuſſion. The truth and juſtneſs of the definition, which I have given of Poetry, will appear more fully from the account which I am now to give of its origin; and which will tend to throw light on much of what I am afterwards to deliver, concerning its various kinds.

THE

LECT. XXXVIII.

THE Greeks, ever fond of attributing to their own nation the invention of all ſciences and arts, have aſcribed the origin of Poetry to Orpheus, Linus, and Muſæus. There were, perhaps, ſuch perſons as theſe, who were the firſt diſtinguiſhed Bards in the Grecian countries. But long before ſuch names were heard of, and among nations where they were never known, Poetry exiſted. It is a great error to imagine, that Poetry and Muſic are Arts which belong only to poliſhed nations. They have their foundation in the nature of man, and belong to all nations, and to all ages; though, like other Arts founded in nature, they have been more cultivated, and, from a concurrence of favourable circumſtances, carried to greater perfection in ſome countries, than in others. In order to explore the riſe of Poetry, we muſt have recourſe to the deſerts and the wilds; we muſt go back to the age of hunters and of ſhepherds; to the higheſt antiquity; and to the ſimpleſt form of manners among mankind.

IT has been often ſaid, and the concurring voice of all antiquity affirms, that Poetry is older than Proſe. But in what ſenſe this ſeemingly ſtrange paradox holds true, has not always been well underſtood. There never, certainly, was any period of ſociety, in which men converſed together in Poetical Numbers.

LECT. XXXVIII.

It was in very humble and ſcanty Proſe, as we may eaſily believe, that the firſt tribes carried on intercourſe among themſelves, relating to the wants and neceſſities of life. But from the very beginning of Society, there were occaſions on which they met together for feaſts, ſacrifices, and public aſſemblies; and on all ſuch occaſions, it is well known, that muſic, ſong, and dance, made their principal entertainment. It is chiefly in America, that we have had the opportunity of being made acquainted with men in their ſavage ſtate. We learn from the particular and concurring accounts of Travellers, that, among all the nations of that vaſt continent, eſpecially among the Northern Tribes, with whom we have had moſt intercourſe, muſic and ſong are, at all their meetings, carried on with an incredible degree of enthuſiaſm; that the Chiefs of the Tribe are thoſe who ſignalize themſelves moſt on ſuch occaſions; that it is in ſongs they celebrate their religious rites; that, by theſe, they lament their public and private calamities, the death of friends, or the loſs of warriors; expreſs their joy on their victories; celebrate the great actions of their nation, and their heroes; excite each other to perform brave exploits in war, or to ſuffer death and torments with unſhaken conſtancy.

HERE then we ſee the firſt beginnings of Poetic Compoſition, in thoſe rude effuſions,

which the enthuſiaſm of fancy or paſſion ſuggeſted to untaught men, when rouſed by intereſting events, and by their meeting together in public aſſemblies. Two particulars would early diſtinguiſh this language of ſong, from that in which they converſed on the common occurrences of life; namely, an unuſual arrangement of words, and the employment of bold figures of ſpeech. It would invert words, or change them from that order in which they are commonly placed, to that which moſt ſuited the train in which they roſe in the Speaker's imagination; or which was moſt accommodated to the cadence of the paſſion by which he was moved. Under the influence too of any ſtrong emotion, objects do not appear to us ſuch as they really are, but ſuch as paſſion makes us ſee them. We magnify and exaggerate; we ſeek to intereſt all others in what cauſes our emotion; we compare the leaſt things to the greateſt; we call upon the abſent as well as the preſent, and even addreſs ourſelves to things inanimate. Hence, in congruity with thoſe various movements of the mind, ariſe thoſe turns of expreſſion, which we now diſtinguiſh by the learned names of Hyperbole, Proſopopœia, Simile, &c. but which are no other than the native original language of Poetry, among the moſt barbarous nations.

LECT. XXXVIII.

MAN is both a Poet, and a Muſician, by nature. The ſame impulſe which prompted the enthuſiaſtic Poetic Style, prompted a certain melody, or modulation of ſound, ſuited to the emotions of Joy or Grief, of Admiration, Love, or Anger. There is a power in ſound, which, partly from nature, partly from habit and aſſociation, makes ſuch pathetic impreſſions on the fancy, as delight even the moſt wild barbarians. Muſic and Poetry, therefore, had the ſame riſe; they were prompted by the ſame occaſions; they were united in ſong; and, as long as they continued united, they tended, without doubt, mutually to heighten and exalt each other's power. The firſt Poets ſung their own Verſes; and hence the beginning of what we call Verſification, or Words arranged in a more artful order than Proſe, ſo as to be ſuited to ſome tune or melody. The liberty of tranſpoſition, or inverſion, which the Poetic Style, as I obſerved, would naturally aſſume, made it eaſier to form the words into ſome ſort of numbers that fell in with the Muſic of the Song. Very harſh and uncouth, we may eaſily believe, theſe numbers would be at firſt. But the pleaſure was felt; it was ſtudied; and Verſification, by degrees, paſſed into an Art.

IT appears from what has been ſaid, that the firſt Compoſitions, which were either recorded

corded by Writing, or tranſmitted by Tradition, could be no other than Poetical Compoſitions. No other but theſe, could draw the attention of men in their rude unciviliſed ſtate. Indeed, they knew no other. Cool reaſoning, and plain diſcourſe, had no power to attract ſavage Tribes, addicted only to hunting and war. There was nothing that could either rouſe the Speaker to pour himſelf forth, or draw the crowd to liſten, but the high powers of Paſſion, of Muſic, and of Song. This vehicle, therefore, and no other, could be employed by Chiefs and Legiſlators, when they meant to inſtruct, or to animate their Tribes. There is, likewiſe, a farther reaſon why ſuch Compoſitions only could be tranſmitted to poſterity; becauſe, before Writing was invented, Songs only could laſt, and be remembered. The ear gave aſſiſtance to the memory, by the help of Numbers; fathers repeated and ſung them to their children; and by this oral tradition of national Ballads, were conveyed all the hiſtorical knowledge, and all the inſtruction, of the firſt ages.

The earlieſt accounts which Hiſtory gives us concerning all nations, bear teſtimony to theſe facts. In the firſt ages of Greece, Prieſts, Philoſophers, and Stateſmen, all delivered their inſtructions in Poetry. Apollo, Orpheus, and Amphion, their moſt antient Bards,

LECT. XXXVIII.

Bards, are repreſented as the firſt tamers of mankind, the firſt founders of law and civiliſation. Minos and Thales ſung to the Lyre the laws which they compoſed *; and till the age immediately preceding that of Herodotus, Hiſtory had appeared in no other form than that of Poetical Tales.

In the ſame manner, among all other nations, Poets and Songs are the firſt objects that make their appearance. Among the Scythian or Gothic nations, many of their kings and leaders were Scalders, or Poets; and it is from their Runic Songs, that the moſt early Writers of their Hiſtory, ſuch as Saxo-Grammaticus, acknowledge, that they had derived their chief information. Among the Celtic Tribes, in Gaul, Britain, and Ireland, we know, in what admiration their Bards were held, and how great influence they poſſeſſed over the people. They were both Poets and Muſicians, as all the firſt Poets, in every country, were. They were always near the perſon of the chief or ſovereign; they recorded all his great exploits; they were employed as the ambaſſadors between contending tribes, and their perſons were held ſacred.

From this deduction it follows, that as we have reaſon to look for Poems and Songs among the antiquities of all countries, ſo we

* Strabo, l. 10.

may

may expect, that in the ſtrain of theſe there will be a remarkable reſemblance, during the primitive periods of every country. The occaſions of their being compoſed, are every where nearly the ſame. The praiſes of Gods and heroes, the celebration of famed anceſtors, the recital of martial deeds, ſongs of victory, and ſongs of lamentation over the misfortunes and death of their countrymen, occur among all nations; and the ſame enthuſiaſm and fire, the ſame wild and irregular, but animated Compoſition, conciſe and glowing Style, bold and extravagant Figures of Speech, are the general diſtinguiſhing characters of all the moſt antient original Poetry. That ſtrong hyperbolical manner which we have been long accuſtomed to call the Oriental manner of poetry (becauſe ſome of the earlieſt poetical productions came to us from the Eaſt), is in truth no more Oriental than Occidental; it is characteriſtical of an age rather than of a country; and belongs, in ſome meaſure, to all nations at that period which firſt gives riſe to Muſic and to Song. Mankind never reſemble each other, ſo much as they do in the beginnings of ſociety. Its ſubſequent revolutions give birth to the principal diſtinctions of character among nations, and divert into channels widely ſeparated, that current of human genius and manners, which deſcends originally from one ſpring.

DIVERSITY

LECT. XXXVIII.

DIVERSITY of climate, and of manner of living, will, however, occaſion ſome diverſity in the ſtrain of the firſt Poetry of nations; chiefly, according as thoſe nations are of a more ferocious, or of a more gentle ſpirit; and according as they advance faſter or ſlower in the arts of civiliſation. Thus we find all the remains of the antient Gothic Poetry remarkably fierce, and breathing nothing but ſlaughter and blood; while the Peruvian and the Chineſe Songs turned, from the earlieſt times, upon milder ſubjects. The Celtic Poetry in the days of Oſſian, though chiefly of the martial kind, yet had attained a conſiderable mixture of tenderneſs and refinement; in conſequence of the long cultivation of Poetry among the Celtæ, by means of a ſeries and ſucceſſion of Bards which had been eſtabliſhed for ages. So Lucan informs us:

Vos quoque qui fortes animos, belloque peremptos
Laudibus in longum vates diffunditis ævum
Plurimus ſecuri fudiſtis carmina Bardi *. [L. 44.]

AMONG the Grecian nations, their early Poetry appears to have ſoon received a philo-

* You too, ye bards, whom ſacred raptures fire
To chaunt your heroes to your country's lyre,
Who conſecrate in your immortal ſtrain,
Brave patriot ſouls in righteous battle ſlain;
Securely now the uſeful taſk renew,
And nobleſt themes in deathleſs ſongs purſue.
Rowe.

ſophical

LECT. XXXVIII.

ſophical caſt, from what we are informed concerning the ſubjects of Orpheus, Linus, and Muſæus, who treated of Creation and of Chaos, of the Generation of the World, and of the Riſe of Things; and we know that the Greeks advanced ſooner to philoſophy, and proceeded with a quicker pace in all the arts of refinement than moſt other nations.

THE Arabians and the Perſians have always been the greateſt Poets of the Eaſt; and among them, as among other nations, Poetry was the earlieſt vehicle of all their learning and inſtruction*. The ancient Arabs, we are informed †, valued themſelves much on their metrical Compoſitions, which were of two ſorts; the one they compared to looſe pearls, and the other to pearls ſtrung. In the former, the ſentences or verſes were without connection; and their beauty aroſe from the elegance of the expreſſion, and the acuteneſs of the ſentiment. The moral doctrines of the Perſians were generally comprehended in ſuch independent proverbial apothegms, formed into verſe. In this reſpect they bear a conſiderable reſemblance to the Proverbs of Solomon; a great part of which book conſiſts of uncon-

* Vid. Voyages de Chardin, chap. de la Poëſie des Perſans.

† Vid. Preliminary Diſcourſe to Sale's Tranſlation of the Koran.

LECT. XXXVIII.

nected Poetry, like the looſe pearls of the Arabians. The ſame form of Compoſition appears alſo in the Book of Job. The Greeks ſeem to have been the firſt who introduced a more regular ſtructure, and cloſer connection of parts, into their Poetical Writings.

During the infancy of Poetry, all the different kinds of it lay confuſed, and were mingled in the ſame Compoſition, according as inclination, enthuſiaſm, or caſual incidents, directed the Poet's ſtrain. In the progreſs of Society and Arts, they began to aſſume thoſe different regular forms, and to be diſtinguiſhed by thoſe different names under which we now know them. But in the firſt rude ſtate of Poetical Effuſions, we can eaſily diſcern the ſeeds and beginnings of all the kinds of regular Poetry. Odes and Hymns of every ſort, would naturally be among the firſt Compoſitions; according as the Bards were moved by religious feelings, by exultation, reſentment, love, or any other warm ſentiment, to pour themſelves forth in Song. Plaintive or Elegiac Poetry, would as naturally ariſe from lamentations over their deceaſed friends. The recital of the atchievements of their heroes, and their anceſtors, gave birth to what we now call Epic Poetry; and as, not content with ſimply reciting theſe, they would infallibly be led, at ſome of their public meetings, to repreſent them, by introducing different

Bards

LECT. XXXVIII.

Bards ſpeaking in the character of their heroes, and anſwering each other, we find in this the firſt outlines of Tragedy, or Dramatic Writing.

None of theſe kinds of Poetry, however, were in the firſt ages of Society properly diſtinguiſhed or ſeparated, as they are now, from each other. Indeed, not only were the different kinds of Poetry then mixed together, but all that we now call Letters, or Compoſition of any kind, was then blended in one maſs. At firſt, Hiſtory, Eloquence, and Poetry, were all the ſame. Whoever wanted to move or to perſuade, to inform or to entertain his countrymen and neighbours, whatever was the ſubject, accompanied his ſentiments and tales with the melody of Song. This was the caſe in that period of Society, when the character and occupations of the huſbandman and the builder, the warrior and the ſtateſman, were united in one perſon. When the progreſs of Society brought on a ſeparation of the different Arts and Profeſſions of Civil Life, it led alſo by degrees to a ſeparation of the different literary provinces from each other.

The Art of Writing was in proceſs of time invented; records of paſt tranſactions began to be kept; men, occupied with the ſubjects of policy and uſeful arts, wiſhed now to be inſtructed and informed, as well as moved.

LECT. XXXVIII.

They reaſoned and reflected upon the affairs of life; and were intereſted by what was real, not fabulous, in paſt tranſactions. The Hiſtorian, therefore, now laid aſide the buſkins of Poetry; he wrote in Proſe, and attempted to give a faithful and judicious relation of former events. The Philoſopher addreſſed himſelf chiefly to the underſtanding. The Orator ſtudied to perſuade by reaſoning, and retained more or leſs of the antient paſſionate, and glowing Style, according as it was conducive to his purpoſe. Poetry became now a ſeparate art, calculated chiefly to pleaſe, and confined generally to ſuch ſubjects as related to the imagination and paſſions. Even its earlieſt companion, Muſic, was in a great meaſure divided from it.

These ſeparations brought all the literary arts into a more regular form, and contributed to the exact and accurate cultivation of each. Poetry, however, in its antient original condition, was perhaps more vigorous than it is in its modern ſtate. It included then, the whole burſt of the human mind; the whole exertion of its imaginative faculties. It ſpoke then the language of paſſion, and no other; for to paſſion, it owed its birth. Prompted and inſpired by objects which to him ſeemed great, by events which intereſted his country or his friends, the early Bard aroſe and ſung.

He

LECT. XXXVIII.

He ſung indeed in wild and diſorderly ſtrains; but they were the native effuſions of his heart; they were the ardent conceptions of admiration or reſentment, of ſorrow or friendſhip, which he poured forth. It is no wonder, therefore, that in the rude and artleſs ſtrain of the firſt Poetry of all nations, we ſhould often find ſomewhat that captivates and tranſports the mind. In after-ages, when Poetry became a regular art, ſtudied for reputation and for gain, Authors began to affect what they did not feel. Compoſing coolly in their cloſets, they endeavoured to imitate paſſion, rather than to expreſs it; they tried to force their imagination into raptures, or to ſupply the defect of native warmth, by thoſe artificial ornaments which might give Compoſition a ſplendid appearance.

The ſeparation of Muſic from Poetry, produced conſequences not favourable in ſome reſpects to Poetry, and in many reſpects hurtful to Muſic*. As long as they remained united, Muſic enlivened and animated Poetry, and Poetry gave force and expreſſion to muſical ſound. The Muſic of that early period was, beyond doubt, extremely ſimple; and muſt have conſiſted chiefly of ſuch pathetic notes, as the voice could adapt to the words

* See Dr. Brown's Diſſertation on the *Riſe, Union, and Separation of Poetry and Muſic.*

LECT. XXXVIII.

of the Song. Muſical inſtruments, ſuch as flutes, and pipes, and a lyre with a very few ſtrings, appear to have been early invented among ſome nations; but no more was intended by theſe inſtruments, than ſimply to accompany the voice, and to heighten the melody of Song. The Poet's ſtrain was always heard; and, from many circumſtances, it appears, that among the antient Greeks, as well as among other nations, the Bard ſung his verſes, and played upon his harp or lyre at the ſame time. In this ſtate, the art of Muſic was, when it produced all thoſe great effects, of which we read ſo much in antient ſtory. And certain it is, that from ſimple Muſic only, and from Muſic accompanied with Verſe or Song, we are to look for ſtrong expreſſion, and powerful influence over the human mind. When inſtrumental Muſic came to be ſtudied as a ſeparate art, diveſted of the Poet's Song, and formed into the artificial and intricate combinations of harmony, it loſt all its antient power of inflaming the hearers with ſtrong emotions; and ſunk into an art of mere amuſement, among poliſhed and luxurious nations.

STILL, however, Poetry preſerves, in all countries, ſome remains of its firſt and original connection with Muſic. By being uttered in Song, it was formed into numbers, or into an artificial arrangement of words and ſyllables,

lables, very different in different countries; but ſuch, as to the inhabitants of each, ſeemed moſt melodious and agreeable in ſound. Whence ariſes that great characteriſtic of Poetry which we now call Verſe; a ſubject which comes next to be treated of.

It is a ſubject of a curious nature; but as I am ſenſible, that, were I to purſue it as far as my inclination leads, it would give riſe to diſcuſſions, which the greater part of Readers would conſider as minute, I ſhall confine myſelf to a few obſervations upon Engliſh Verſification.

Nations, whoſe language and pronunciation were of a muſical kind, reſted their Verſification chiefly upon the quantities, that is, the length or ſhortneſs of their ſyllables. Others, who did not make the quantities of their ſyllables be ſo diſtinctly perceived in pronouncing them, reſted the melody of their Verſe upon the number of ſyllables it contained, upon the proper diſpoſition of accents and pauſes in it, and frequently upon that return of correſponding ſounds, which we call Rhyme. The former was the caſe with the Greeks and Romans; the latter is the caſe with us, and with moſt modern nations. Among the Greeks and Romans, every ſyllable, or the far greateſt number at leaſt, was known to have a fixed and determined quan-

LECT. XXXVIII.

tity; and their manner of pronouncing rendered this ſo ſenſible to the ear, that a long ſyllable was counted preciſely equal in time to two ſhort ones. Upon this principle, the number of ſyllables contained in their hexameter verſe was allowed to vary. It may extend to 17; it can contain, when regular, no fewer than 13: but the muſical time was, notwithſtanding, preciſely the ſame in every hexameter verſe, and was always equal to that of 12 long ſyllables. In order to aſcertain the regular time of every verſe, and the proper mixture and ſucceſſion of long and ſhort ſyllables which ought to compoſe it, were invented, what the Grammarians call Metrical Feet, Dactyles, Spondees, Iambus, &c. By theſe meaſures was tried the accuracy of Compoſition in every line, and whether it was ſo conſtructed as to complete its proper melody. It was requiſite, for inſtance, that the hexameter verſe ſhould have the quantity of its ſyllables ſo diſpoſed, that it could be ſcanned or meaſured by ſix metrical feet, which might be either Dactyles or Spondees (as the muſical time of both theſe is the ſame), with this reſtriction only, that the fifth foot was regularly to be a Dactyle, and the laſt a Spondee *.

THE

* Some writers imagine, that the feet in Latin Verſe were intended to correſpond to bars in Muſic, and to form muſical intervals or diſtinctions, ſenſible to the ear in the pro-

LECT. XXXVIII.

THE introduction of theſe feet into Engliſh Verſe, would be altogether out of place; for the genius of our language correſponds not in this reſpect to the Greek or Latin. I ſay not, that we have no regard to quantity, or to long and ſhort, in pronouncing. Many words we have, eſpecially our words conſiſting of ſeveral ſyllables, where the quantity, or the long

pronunciation of the line. Had this been the caſe, every kind of Verſe muſt have had a peculiar order of feet appropriated to it. But the common proſodies ſhow, that there are ſeveral forms of Latin Verſe which are capable of being meaſured indifferently, by a ſeries of feet of very different kinds. For inſtance, what is called the Aſclepedæan Verſe (in which the firſt Ode of Horace is written) may be ſcanned either by a Spondeus, two Choriambus's, and a Pyrrichius; or by a Spondeus, a Dactylus ſucceeded by a Cæſura, and two Dactylus's. The common Pentameter, and ſome other forms of Verſe, admit the like varieties; and yet the melody of the Verſe remains always the ſame, though it be ſcanned by different feet. This proves, that the metrical feet were not ſenſible in the pronunciation of the line, but were intended only to regulate its conſtruction; or applied as meaſures, to try whether the ſucceſſion of long and ſhort ſyllables was ſuch as ſuited the melody of the Verſe: and as feet of different kinds could ſometimes be applied for this purpoſe, hence it happened, that ſome forms of Verſe were capable of being ſcanned in different ways. For meaſuring the hexameter line, no other feet were found ſo proper as Dactyles and Spondees, and therefore by theſe it is uniformly ſcanned. But no ear is ſenſible of the termination of each foot, in reading an hexameter line. From a miſapprehenſion of this matter, I apprehend that confuſion has ſometimes ariſen among Writers, in treating of the proſody both of Latin, and of Engliſh Verſe.

LECT. XXXVIII.

and ſhort ſyllables, are invariably fixed; but great numbers we have alſo, where the quantity is left altogether looſe. This is the caſe with a great part of our words conſiſting of two ſyllables, and with almoſt all our monoſyllables. In general, the difference made between long and ſhort ſyllables, in our manner of pronouncing them, is ſo very inconſiderable, and ſo much liberty is left us for making them either long or ſhort at pleaſure, that mere quantity is of very little effect in Engliſh Verſification. The only perceptible difference among our ſyllables, ariſes from ſome of them being uttered with that ſtronger percuſſion of voice, which we call Accent. This Accent does not always make the ſyllable longer, but gives it more force of ſound only: and it is upon a certain order and ſucceſſion of accented and unaccented ſyllables, infinitely more than upon their being long or ſhort, that the melody of our Verſe depends. If we take any of Mr. Pope's lines, and in reciting them alter the quantity of the ſyllables, as far as our quantities are ſenſible, the Muſic of the Verſe will not be much injured: whereas, if we do not accent the ſyllables according as the Verſe dictates, its melody will be totally deſtroyed *.

OUR

* See this well illuſtrated in Lord Monboddo's Treatiſe of *the Origin and Progreſs of Language*, Vol. II. under the head of the Proſody of Language. He ſhows that this is not

LECT. XXXVIII.

Our Engliſh Heroic Verſe is of what may be called an Iambic ſtructure; that is, compoſed of a ſucceſſion nearly alternate of ſyllables, not ſhort and long, but unaccented and accented. With regard to the place of theſe accents, however, ſome liberty is admitted, for the ſake of variety. Very often, though not always, the line begins with an unaccented ſyllable; and ſometimes, in the courſe of it, two unaccented ſyllables follow each other. But, in general, there are either five, or four, accented ſyllables in each line. The number of ſyllables is ten, unleſs where an Alexandrian Verſe is occaſionally admitted. In Verſes not Alexandrian, inſtances occur where the line appears to have more than the limited number. But in ſuch inſtances, I apprehend it will be found, that ſome of the liquid ſyllables are ſo ſlurred in pronouncing, as to bring the Verſe, with reſpect to its effect upon the ear, within the uſual bounds.

not only the conſtitution of our own Verſe, but that by our manner of reading Latin Verſe, we make its Muſic nearly the ſame. For we certainly do not pronounce it according to the antient quantities, ſo as to make the muſical time of one long ſyllable equal to two ſhort ones; but according to a ſucceſſion of accented and unaccented ſyllables, only mixed in a ratio different from that of our own Verſe. No Roman could poſſibly underſtand our pronunciation.

LECT. XXXVIII.

ANOTHER eſſential circumſtance in the conſtitution of our Verſe, is the cæſural pauſe, which falls towards the middle of each line. Some pauſe of this kind, dictated by the melody, is found in the Verſe of moſt nations. It is found, as might be ſhewn, in the Latin hexameter. In the French Heroic Verſe, it is very ſenſible. That is a verſe of twelve ſyllables, and in every line, juſt after the ſixth ſyllable, there falls regularly and indiſpenſably, a cæſural pauſe, dividing the line into two equal hemiſtichs. For example, in the firſt lines of Boileau's Epiſtle to the King:

Jeune & vaillant heros | dont la haute ſageſſe
N'eſt point le fruit tardif | d'une lente vieilleſſe,
Qui ſeul ſans Miniſtre | à l'example des Dieux
Soutiens tout par toi-même | & vois tous par ſes yeux.

In this train all their Verſes proceed; the one half of the line always anſwering to the other, and the ſame chime returning inceſſantly on the ear without intermiſſion or change; which is certainly a defect in their Verſe, and unfits it ſo very much for the freedom and dignity of Heroic Poetry. On the other hand, it is a diſtinguiſhing advantage of our Engliſh Verſe, that it allows the pauſe to be varied through four different ſyllables in the line. The pauſe may fall after the 4th, the 5th, the 6th, or the 7th ſyllable; and according as the pauſe is placed after one or other of theſe ſyllables, the

the melody of the Verſe is much changed, its air and cadence are diverſified. By this means, uncommon richneſs and variety are added to Engliſh Verſification.

When the pauſe falls earlieſt, that is, after the 4th ſyllable, the briſkeſt melody is thereby formed, and the moſt ſpirited air given to the line. In the following lines of the Rape of the Lock, Mr. Pope has, with exquiſite propriety, ſuited the conſtruction of the Verſe to the ſubject:

On her white breaſt | a ſparkling croſs ſhe wore,
Which Jews might kiſs | and Infidels adore;
Her lively looks | a ſprightly mind diſcloſe,
Quick as her eyes | and as unfix'd as thoſe.
Favours to none | to all ſhe ſmiles extends,
Oft ſhe rejects | but never once offends.

When the pauſe falls after the 5th ſyllable, which divides the line into two equal portions, the melody is ſenſibly altered. The Verſe loſes that briſk and ſprightly air, which it had with the former pauſe, and becomes more ſmooth, gentle, and flowing.

Eternal ſunſhine | of the ſpotleſs mind,
Each prayer accepted | and each wiſh reſign'd.

When the pauſe proceeds to follow the 6th ſyllable, the tenor of the Muſic becomes ſolemn and grave. The Verſe marches now with

LECT. XXXVIII.

with a more ſlow and meaſured pace, than in either of the two former caſes.

The wrath of Peleus' ſon | the direful ſpring
Of all the Grecian woes | O Goddeſs ſing!

But the grave, ſolemn cadence becomes ſtill more ſenſible, when the pauſe falls after the 7th ſyllable, which is the neareſt place to the end of the line that it can occupy. This kind of Verſe occurs the ſeldomeſt, but has a happy effect in diverſifying the melody. It produces that ſlow Alexandrian air, which is finely ſuited to a cloſe; and for this reaſon, ſuch lines almoſt never occur together, but are uſed in finiſhing the couplet.

And in the ſmooth deſcription | murmur ſtill.
Long loved adored ideas! | all adieu.

I have taken my examples from Verſes in rhyme; becauſe in theſe, our Verſification is ſubjected to the ſtricteſt law. As Blank Verſe is of a freer kind, and naturally is read with leſs cadence or tone, the pauſes in it, and the effect of them, are not always ſo ſenſible to the ear. It is conſtructed, however, entirely upon the ſame principles, with reſpect to the place of the pauſe. There are ſome, who, in order to exalt the variety and the power of our Heroic Verſe, have maintained that it admits of muſical pauſes, not only after thoſe four ſyllables, where I aſſigned their place, but

but after any one ſyllable in the Verſe indifferently, where the ſenſe directs it to be placed. This, in my opinion, is the ſame thing as to maintain that there is no pauſe at all belonging to the natural melody of the Verſe; ſince, according to this notion, the pauſe is formed entirely by the meaning, not by the Muſic. But this I apprehend to be contrary both to the nature of Verſification, and to the experience of every good ear*. Thoſe certainly are the happieſt lines, wherein the pauſe, prompted by the melody, coincides in ſome degree with that of the ſenſe, or at leaſt does not tend to ſpoil or interrupt the meaning. Wherever any oppoſition between the muſic and the ſenſe chances to take place, I obſerved before, in treating of Pronunciation or Delivery, that the proper method of

* In the Italian Heroic Verſe employed by Taſſo in his Gieruſalemme, and Arioſto in his Orlando, the pauſes are of the ſame varied nature with thoſe which I have ſhown to belong to Engliſh Verſification, and fall after the ſame four ſyllables in the line. Marmontel, in his Poëtique Françoiſe, Vol. I. p. 269, takes notice, that this conſtruction of Verſe is common to the Italians and the Engliſh; and defends the uniformity of the French cæſural pauſe upon this ground, that the alternation of maſculine and feminine rhymes, furniſhes ſufficient variety to the French Poetry; whereas the change of movement, occaſioned by the four different pauſes in Engliſh and Italian Verſe, produces, according to him, too great diverſity. On the head of pauſes in Engliſh Verſification, ſee the Elements of Criticiſm, Chap. 18. Sect. 4.

reading

LECT. XXXVIII.

reading theſe lines, is to read them according as the ſenſe dictates, neglecting or ſlurring the cæſural pauſe; which renders the line leſs graceful indeed, but, however, does not entirely deſtroy its ſound.

Our Blank Verſe poſſeſſes great advantages, and is indeed a noble, bold, and diſencumbered ſpecies of Verſification. The principal defect in rhyme, is the full cloſe which it forces upon the ear, at the end of every couplet. Blank Verſe is freed from this; and allows the lines to run into each other with as great liberty as the Latin hexameter permits, perhaps with greater. Hence it is particularly ſuited to ſubjects of dignity and force, which demand more free and manly numbers than rhyme. The conſtraint and ſtrict regularity of rhyme, are unfavourable to the ſublime, or to the highly pathetic ſtrain. An Epic Poem, or a Tragedy, would be fettered and degraded by it. It is beſt adapted to compoſitions of a temperate ſtrain, where no particular vehemence is required in the Sentiments, nor great ſublimity in the Style; ſuch as Paſtorals, Elegies, Epiſtles, Satires, &c. To theſe, it communicates that degree of elevation which is proper for them; and without any other aſſiſtance ſufficiently diſtinguiſhes the Style from Proſe. He who ſhould write ſuch Poems in Blank Verſe, would render his

work harſh and unpleaſing. In order to ſupport a poetical Style, he would be obliged to affect a pomp of language unſuitable to the ſubject.

THOUGH I join in opinion with thoſe, who think that rhyme finds its proper place in the middle, but not in the higher regions of Poetry, I can by no means join in the invectives which ſome have poured out againſt it, as if it were a mere barbarous jingling of ſounds, fit only for children, and owing to nothing but the corruption of taſte in the monkiſh ages. Rhyme might indeed be barbarous in Latin or Greek Verſe, becauſe theſe languages, by the ſonorouſneſs of their words, by their liberty of tranſpoſition and inverſion, by their fixed quantities and muſical pronunciation, could carry on the melody of verſe without its aid. But it does not follow, that therefore it muſt be barbarous in the Engliſh language, which is deſtitute of theſe advantages. Every language has powers and graces, and muſic peculiar to itſelf; and what is becoming in one, would be ridiculous in another. Rhyme was barbarous in Latin; and an attempt to conſtruct Engliſh Verſes, after the form of hexameters, and pentameters, and Sapphics, is as barbarous among us. It is not true, that rhyme is merely a monkiſh invention. On the contrary, it has obtained under different forms,

in

LECT. XXXVIII.

in the Verſification of moſt known nations. It is found in the Antient Poetry of the northern nations of Europe; it is ſaid to be found among the Arabs, the Perſians, the Indians, and the Americans. This ſhows that there is ſomething in the return of ſimilar ſounds, which is grateful to the ears of moſt part of mankind. And if any one, after reading Mr. Pope's Rape of the Rock, or Eloiſa to Abelard, ſhall not admit our rhyme, with all its varieties of pauſes, to carry both elegance, and ſweetneſs of ſound, his ear muſt be pronounced to be of a very peculiar kind.

The preſent form of our Engliſh heroic rhyme in couplets, is a modern ſpecies of Verſification. The meaſure generally uſed in the days of Queen Elizabeth, King James, and King Charles I. was the ſtanza of eight lines, ſuch as Spencer employs, borrowed from the Italian; a meaſure very conſtrained and artificial. Waller was the firſt who brought couplets into vogue; and Dryden afterwards eſtabliſhed the uſage. Waller firſt ſmoothed our Verſe; Dryden perfected it. Mr Pope's Verſification has a peculiar character. It is flowing and ſmooth, in the higheſt degree; far more laboured and correct than that of any who went before him. He introduced one conſiderable change into Heroic Verſe, by totally throwing aſide the triplets, or three lines rhyming

LECT. XXXVIII.

rhyming together, in which Mr. Dryden abounded. Dryden's Verſification, however, has very great merit; and, like all his productions, has much ſpirit, mixed with careleſſneſs. If not ſo ſmooth and correct as Pope's, it is however more varied and eaſy. He ſubjects himſelf leſs to the rule of cloſing the ſenſe with the couplet; and frequently takes the liberty of making his couplets run into one another, with ſomewhat of the freedom of Blank Verſe.

LECTURE XXXIX.

PASTORAL POETRY—LYRIC POETRY.

LECT. XXXIX.

IN the laſt Lecture, I gave an account of the Riſe and Progreſs of Poetry, and made ſome obſervations on the nature of Engliſh Verſification. I now proceed to treat of the chief kinds of Poetical Compoſition; and of the critical rules that relate to them. I ſhall follow that order which is moſt ſimple and natural; beginning with the leſſer forms of Poetry, and aſcending from them to the Epic and Dramatic, as the moſt dignified. This Lecture ſhall be employed on Paſtoral and Lyric Poetry.

THOUGH I begin with the conſideration of Paſtoral Poetry, it is not becauſe I conſider it as one of the earlieſt forms of Poetical Compoſition. On the contrary, I am of opinion that it was not cultivated as a diſtinct ſpecies, or ſubject of Writing, until Society had advanced

LECT. XXXIX.

in refinement. Moſt Authors have indeed indulged the fancy, that becauſe the life which mankind at firſt led was rural, therefore their firſt Poetry was Paſtoral, or employed in the celebration of rural ſcenes and objects. I make no doubt, that it would borrow many of its images and alluſions from thoſe natural objects, with which men were beſt acquainted; but I am perſuaded that the calm and tranquil ſcenes of rural felicity were not, by any means, the firſt objects which inſpired that ſtrain of Compoſition, which we now call Poetry. It was inſpired, in the firſt periods of every nation, by events and objects which rouſed men's paſſions; or, at leaſt, awakened their wonder and admiration. The actions of their Gods and Heroes, their own exploits in war, the ſucceſſes or misfortunes of their countrymen and friends, furniſhed the firſt Themes to the Bards of every country. What was of a Paſtoral kind in their Compoſitions, was incidental only. They did not think of chooſing for their Theme, the tranquillity and the pleaſures of the country, as long as theſe were daily and familiar objects to them. It was not till men had begun to be aſſembled in great cities, after the diſtinctions of rank and ſtation were formed, and the buſtle of Courts and large Societies was known, that Paſtoral Poetry aſſumed its preſent form. Men then began to look back upon the more ſimple and

LECT. XXXIX.

innocent life, which their forefathers led, or which, at leaſt, they fancied them to have led: they looked back upon it with pleaſure; and in thoſe rural ſcenes, and paſtoral occupations, imagining a degree of felicity to take place, ſuperior to what they now enjoyed, conceived the idea of celebrating it in Poetry. It was in the court of King Ptolemy, that Theocritus wrote the firſt Paſtorals with which we are acquainted; and, in the court of Auguſtus, he was imitated by Virgil.

But whatever may have been the origin of Paſtoral Poetry, it is, undoubtedly, a natural, and very agreeable form of Poetical Compoſition. It recalls to our imagination, thoſe gay ſcenes, and pleaſing views of nature, which commonly are the delight of our childhood and youth; and to which, in more advanced years, the greateſt part of men recur with pleaſure. It exhibits to us a life, with which we are accuſtomed to aſſociate the ideas of peace, of leiſure, and of innocence; and, therefore, we readily ſet open our heart to ſuch repreſentations as promiſe to baniſh from our thoughts the cares of the world, and to tranſport us into calm Elyſian regions. At the ſame time, no ſubject ſeems to be more favourable to Poetry. Amidſt rural objects, nature preſents, on all hands, the fineſt field for deſcription; and nothing appears to flow

LECT. XXXIX.

more, of its own accord, into Poetical Numbers, than rivers and mountains, meadows and hills, flocks and trees, and ſhepherds void of care. Hence, this ſpecies of Poetry has, at all times, allured many Readers, and excited many Writers. But, notwithſtanding the advantages it poſſeſſes, it will appear, from what I have farther to obſerve upon it, that there is hardly any ſpecies of Poetry which is more difficult to be carried to perfection, or in which fewer Writers have excelled.

PASTORAL life may be conſidered in three different views; either ſuch as it now actually is; when the ſtate of Shepherds is reduced to be a mean, ſervile, and laborious ſtate; when their employments are become diſagreeable, and their ideas groſs and low: or ſuch as we may ſuppoſe it once to have been, in the more early and ſimple ages, when it was a life of eaſe and abundance; when the wealth of men conſiſted chiefly in flocks and herds, and the Shepherd, though unrefined in his manners, was reſpectable in his ſtate: or, laſtly, ſuch as it never was, and never can in reality be, when, to the eaſe, innocence, and ſimplicity of the early ages, we attempt to add the poliſhed taſte, and cultivated manners, of modern times. Of theſe three ſtates, the firſt is too groſs and mean, the laſt too refined and unnatural, to be made the ground-work of

LECT. XXXIX.

Paſtoral Poetry. Either of theſe extremes is a rock upon which the Poet will ſplit, if he approach too near it. We ſhall be diſguſted if he give us too much of the ſervile employments and low ideas of actual peaſants, as Theocritus is cenſured for having ſometimes done; and if, like ſome of the French and Italian Writers of Paſtorals, he makes his Shepherds diſcourſe as if they were courtiers and ſcholars, he then retains the name only, but wants the ſpirit of Paſtoral Poetry.

He muſt, therefore, keep in the middle ſtation between theſe. He muſt form to himſelf the idea of a rural ſtate, ſuch as in certain periods of Society may have actually taken place, where there was eaſe, equality, and innocence; where Shepherds were gay and agreeable, without being learned or refined; and plain and artleſs, without being groſs and wretched. The great charm of Paſtoral Poetry ariſes from the view which it exhibits of the tranquillity and happineſs of a rural life. This pleaſing illuſion, therefore, the Poet muſt carefully maintain. He muſt diſplay to us, all that is agreeable in that ſtate, but hide whatever is diſpleaſing*. Let him paint its ſimplicity and innocence to the full; but cover its

* In the following beautiful lines of the Firſt Eclogue, Virgil has, in the true ſpirit of a Paſtoral Poet, brought together as agreeable an aſſemblage of images of rural pleaſure as can any where be found.

Fortunate

its rudeneſs and miſery. Diſtreſſes, indeed, and anxieties, he may attribute to it; for it would be perfectly unnatural to ſuppoſe any condition of human life to be without them; but they muſt be of ſuch a nature, as not to ſhock the fancy with any thing peculiarly diſguſting in the paſtoral life. The Shepherd may well be afflicted for the diſpleaſure of his miſtreſs, or for the loſs of a favourite lamb. It is a ſufficient recommendation of any ſtate, to have only ſuch evils as theſe to deplore. In ſhort, it is the paſtoral life ſomewhat embelliſhed and beautified, at leaſt ſeen on its faireſt ſide only, that the Poet ought to preſent to us. But let him take care, that, in embelliſhing nature, he do not altogether diſ-

LECT. XXXIX.

Fortunate ſenex! hic inter flumina nota,
Et fontes ſacros, frigus captabis opacum.
Hinc tibi, quæ ſemper vicino ab limite ſepes,
Hyblæis apibus, florem depaſta ſalicti,
Sæpe levi ſomnum ſuadebit inire ſuſurro.
Hinc altâ ſub rupe canet frondator ad auras;
Nec tamen interea, raucæ, tua cura, palumbes,
Nec gemere aëriâ ceſſabit turtur ab ulmo.

Happy old man! here mid th' accuſtom'd ſtreams
And ſacred ſprings you'll ſhun the ſcorching beams;
While from yon willow fence, thy paſture's bound,
The bees that ſuck their flowery ſtores around,
Shall ſweetly mingle, with the whiſpering boughs,
Their lulling murmurs, and invite repoſe.
While from ſteep rocks the pruner's Song is heard;
Nor the ſoft cooing dove, thy fav'rite bird,
Meanwhile ſhall ceaſe to breathe her melting ſtrain,
Nor turtles from th' aërial elms to plain. WARTON.

LECT. XXXIX.

guiſe her; or pretend to join with rural ſimplicity and happineſs, ſuch improvements as are unnatural and foreign to it. If it be not exactly real life which he preſents to us, it muſt, however, be ſomewhat that reſembles it. This, in my opinion, is the general idea of Paſtoral Poetry. But, in order to examine it more particularly, let us conſider, firſt, the ſcenery; next, the characters; and laſtly, the ſubjects and actions, which this ſort of Compoſition ſhould exhibit.

As to the Scene, it is clear, that it muſt always be laid in the country, and much of the Poet's merit depends on deſcribing it beautifully. Virgil is, in this reſpect, excelled by Theocritus, whoſe deſcriptions of natural beauties are richer, and more pictureſque than thoſe of the other *. In every Paſtoral,

* What rural ſcenery, for inſtance, can be painted in more lively colours, than the following deſcription exhibits?

—— ἔν τε βαθείαις
Ἀδείας σχίνοιο χαμευνέσιν ἐκλινθημες
Ἔν τε νεοτμάτοισι γεγαθότες οἰναρέοισι.
Πολλαὶ δ' ἄμμιν ὕπερθε κατα κρατὸς δονέοντο
Αἰγειροι πτελέαι τε. το δ' ἐγγύθεν ἱερὸν ὕδωρ
Νυμφᾶν ἐξ ἄντροιο κατειβόμενον κελάρυσδεν.
Τοὶ δὲ ποτι σκιεραῖς ορεδαμνίσιν αὐθαλίωνες
Τεττίγες λαλαγεῦντες ἔχον πόνον. ἁ δ' ὀλολυγων
Τηλόθεν ἐν πυκιναῖσι βάτων τρύζεσκεν ἀκάνθαις.
Ἄειδον κόρυδοι και ἀκανθίδες, ἔστενε τρύγων·

Πωτωντε

LECT. XXXIX.

Paſtoral, a ſcene, or rural proſpect, ſhould be diſtinctly drawn, and ſet before us. It is not enough, that we have thoſe unmeaning groupes of violets and roſes, of birds, and brooks, and breezes, which our common Paſtoral-mongers throw together, and which are perpetually recurring upon us without variation. A good Poet ought to give us ſuch a landſcape, as a painter could copy after. His objects muſt be particulariſed; the ſtream, the

Πωτωντο ξυθαὶ περι πίδακας αμφι μέλισσαι.
Πάντ' ὤσδεν θέρεος μαλα πίονος; ὤσδε δ' ὀπώρης·
Ὄχναι μὲν πὰρ ποσσὶ, παρα πλινθεσσι δε μαλα
Δαψιλέως ἄμμιν ἐκυλίνδετο· τυι δ' ἐκεχυντο
Ὄρπακες βρα βύλοισι καταβρίθοντες ἔρασδε·

THEOCRIT. Idyll. vii. 132.

—— on ſoft beds recline
Of lentiſk, and young branches of the vine;
Poplars and elms above, their foliage ſpread,
Lent a cool ſhade, and waved the breezy head;
Below, a ſtream, from the nymph's ſacred cave,
In free meanders led its murmuring wave:
In the warm ſun-beams, verdant ſhades among,
Shrill graſshoppers renew'd their plaintive ſong:
At diſtance far, conceal'd in ſhades, alone,
Sweet Philomela pour'd her tuneful moan:
The lark, the goldfinch, warbled lays of love,
And ſweetly penſive coo'd the turtle dove;
While honey bees, for ever on the wing,
Humm'd round the flowers, or ſipt the ſilver ſpring.
The rich, ripe ſeaſon, gratified the ſenſe
With ſummer's ſweets, and autumn's redolence.
Apples and pears lay ſtrew'd in heaps around,
And the plum's loaded branches kiſs'd the ground.

FAWKES.

rock,

LECT. XXXIX.

rock, or the tree, muſt, each of them, ſtand forth, ſo as to make a figure in the imagination, and to give us a pleaſing conception of the place where we are. A ſingle object, happily introduced, will ſometimes diſtinguiſh and characteriſe a whole ſcene; ſuch as the antique ruſtic Sepulchre, a very beautiful object in a landſcape, which Virgil has ſet before us, and which he has taken from Theocritus:

Hinc adeo media eſt nobis via; jamque ſepulchrum
Incipit apparere Bianoris; hic ubi denſas
Agricolæ ſtringunt frondes——— Ecl. IX. *

Not only in profeſſed deſcriptions of the ſcenery, but in the frequent alluſions to natural objects, which occur, of courſe, in Paſtorals, the Poet muſt, above all things, ſtudy variety. He muſt diverſify his face of nature, by preſenting to us new images; or otherwiſe, he will ſoon become inſipid with thoſe known topics of deſcription, which were original, it is true, in the firſt Poets, who copied them from nature, but which are now worn threadbare by inceſſant imitation. It is alſo incumbent on him, to ſuit the ſcenery to the ſubject of the Paſtoral; and, according as it is of a gay

* ——— To our mid journey are we come,
I ſee the top of old Bianor's tomb;
Here, Mæris, where the ſwains thick branches prune,
And ſtrew their leaves, our voices let us tune.
WARTON.

or

LECT. XXXIX.

or a melancholy kind, to exhibit nature under ſuch forms as may correſpond with the emotions or ſentiments which he deſcribes. Thus Virgil, in his ſecond Eclogue, which contains the Lamentation of a deſpairing Lover, gives, with propriety, a gloomy appearance to the ſcene:

Tantum inter denſas, umbroſa cacumina, fagos,
Aſſiduè veniebat; ibi hæc incondita ſolus
Montibus & ſylvis ſtudio jactabat inani*.

With regard to the characters, or perſons, which are proper to be introduced into Paſtorals, it is not enough that they be perſons reſiding in the country. The adventures, or the diſcourſes of courtiers, or citizens, in the country, are not what we look for in ſuch Writings; we expect to be entertained by Shepherds, or perſons wholly engaged in rural occupations; whoſe innocence and freedom from the cares of the world may, in our imagination, form an agreeable contraſt with the manners and characters of thoſe who are engaged in the buſtle of life.

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* Mid ſhades of thickeſt beech he pined alone,
To the wild woods and mountains made his moan;
Still day by day, in incoherent ſtrains,
'Twas all he could, deſpairing told his pains.
WARTON.

LECT. XXXIX.

ONE of the principal difficulties which here occurs has been already hinted; that of keeping the exact medium between too much ruſticity on the one hand, and too much refinement on the other. The Shepherd, aſſuredly, muſt be plain and unaffected in his manner of thinking, on all ſubjects. An amiable ſimplicity muſt be the ground-work of his character. At the ſame time, there is no neceſſity for his being dull and inſipid. He may have good ſenſe and reflection; he may have ſprightlineſs and vivacity; he may have very tender and delicate feelings; ſince theſe are, more or leſs, the portion of men in all ranks of life; and ſince, undoubtedly, there was much genius in the world, before there were learning, or arts, to refine it. But then he muſt not ſubtiliſe; he muſt not deal in general reflections, and abſtract reaſoning; and ſtill leſs in the points and conceits of an affected gallantry, which ſurely belong not to his character and ſituation. Some of theſe conceits are the chief blemiſhes of the Italian Paſtorals, which are otherwiſe beautiful. When Aminta, in Taſſo, is diſentangling his miſtreſs's hair from the tree to which a Savage had bound it, he is repreſented as ſaying: "Cruel tree! how couldſt "thou injure that lovely hair which did thee "ſo much honour? thy rugged trunk was not "worthy of ſuch lovely knots. What advantage

"have

LECT. XXXIX.

"have the ſervants of love, if thoſe precious "chains are common to them, and to the "trees*?" Such ſtrained ſentiments as theſe, ill befit the woods. Rural perſonages are ſuppoſed to ſpeak the language of plain ſenſe, and natural feelings. When they deſcribe, or relate, they do it with ſimplicity, and naturally allude to rural circumſtances; as in thoſe beautiful lines of one of Virgil's Eclogues:

Sepibus in noſtris parvam te roſcida mala
(Dux ego veſter eram) vidi cum matre legentem;
Alter ab undecimo tum me jam ceperat annus,
Jam fragiles poteram a terra contingere ramos.
Ut vidi, ut perii, ut me malus abſtulit error †.

In another paſſage, he makes a Shepherdeſs throw an apple at her Lover:

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* Gia di nodi ſi bei non era degno
Coſi rovido tronco; or che vantaggio
Ilanno i ſervi d' amor, ſe lor commune
E'con le piante il pretioſo laccio?
Pianta crudel! poteſti quel bel crine
Offender, tu, ch'a te feo tanto onore?

ATTO, III. Sc. I.

† Once with your mother to our fields you came
For dewy apples; thence I date my flame;
The choiceſt fruit I pointed to your view,
Tho' young, my raptur'd ſoul was fix'd on you;
The boughs I juſt could reach with little arms;
But then, even then, could feel thy powerful charms.
O, how I gaz'd, in pleaſing tranſport loſt!
How glow'd my heart in ſweet deluſion loſt!

WARTON.

Tum

LECT. XXXIX.

Tum fugit ad ſalices, & ſe cupit ante videri*.

This is *naïve*, as the French expreſs it, and perfectly ſuited to Paſtoral manners. Mr. Pope wanted to imitate this paſſage, and, as he thought, to improve upon it. He does it thus:

The ſprightly Sylvia trips along the green,
She runs; but hopes ſhe does not run unſeen;
While a kind glance at her purſuer flies,
How much at variance are her feet and eyes?

This falls far ſhort of Virgil; the natural and pleaſing ſimplicity of the deſcription is deſtroyed, by the quaint and affected turn in the laſt line: "How much at variance are her "feet and eyes."

SUPPOSING the Poet to have formed correct ideas concerning his Paſtoral characters and perſonages; the next enquiry is, About what is he to employ them? and what are to be the ſubjects of his Eclogues? For it is not enough, that he gives us Shepherds diſcourſing together. Every good Poem, of every kind, ought to have a ſubject which ſhould, in ſome way, intereſt us. Now, here, I apprehend, lies the chief difficulty of Paſtoral Writing.

* My Phillis me with pelted apples plies;
Then, tripping to the wood, the wanton hies,
And wiſhes to be ſeen before ſhe flies. DRYDEN.

The

LECT. XXXIX.

The active ſcenes of country life either are, or to moſt deſcribers appear to be, too barren of incidents. The ſtate of a Shepherd, or a perſon occupied in rural employments only, is expoſed to few of thoſe accidents and revolutions which render his ſituation intereſting, or produce curioſity or ſurpriſe. The tenor of his life is uniform. His ambition is conceived to be without policy, and his love without intrigue. Hence it is, that, of all Poems, the moſt meagre commonly in the ſubject, and the leaſt diverſified in the ſtrain, is the Paſtoral. From the firſt lines, we can, generally, gueſs at all that is to follow. It is either a Shepherd who ſits down ſolitary by a brook, to lament the abſence, or cruelty of his miſtreſs, and to tell us how the trees wither, and the flowers droop, now that ſhe is gone; or we have two Shepherds who challenge one another to ſing, rehearſing alternate verſes, which have little either of meaning or ſubject, till the Judge rewards one with a ſtudded crook, and another with a beechen bowl. To the frequent repetition of common-place topics, of this ſort, which have been thrummed over by all Eclogue Writers ſince the days of Theocritus and Virgil, is owing much of that inſipidity which prevails in Paſtoral Compoſitions.

I MUCH queſtion, however, whether this inſipidity be not owing to the fault of the Poets, and

LECT. XXXIX.

and to their barren and ſlaviſh imitation of the antient paſtoral topics, rather than to the confined nature of the ſubject. For why may not Paſtoral Poetry take a wider range? Human nature, and human paſſions, are much the ſame in every rank of life; and wherever theſe paſſions operate on objects that are within the rural ſphere, there may be a proper ſubject for Paſtoral. One would indeed chooſe to remove from this ſort of Compoſition the operations of violent and direful paſſions, and to preſent ſuch only as are conſiſtent with innocence, ſimplicity, and virtue. But under this limitation, there will ſtill be abundant ſcope for a careful obſerver of nature to exert his genius. The various adventures which give occaſion to thoſe engaged in country life to diſplay their diſpoſition and temper; the ſcenes of domeſtic felicity or diſquiet; the attachment of friends and of brothers; the rivalſhip and competitions of lovers; the unexpected ſucceſſes or misfortunes of families, might give occaſion to many a pleaſing and tender incident; and were more of the narrative and ſentimental intermixed with the deſcriptive in this kind of Poetry, it would become much more intereſting than it now generally is, to the bulk of readers*.

THE

* The above obſervations on the barrenneſs of the common Eclogues were written before any tranſlation from the German

LECT. XXXIX.

THE two great fathers of Paſtoral Poetry are, Theocritus, and Virgil. Theocritus was a Sicilian; and as he has laid the ſcene of his Eclogues in his own country, Sicily became ever afterwards a ſort of conſecrated ground for Paſtoral Poetry. His Idyllia, as he has intitled them, are not all of equal merit; nor indeed are they all Paſtorals; but ſome of them, poems of a quite different nature. In ſuch, however, as are properly Paſtorals, there are many and great beauties. He is diſtinguiſhed for the ſimplicity of his ſentiments; for the great ſweetneſs and harmony of his numbers, and for the richneſs of his ſcenery and deſcription. He is the original, of which Virgil is the imitator. For moſt of Virgil's higheſt beauties in his Eclogues are copied from Theocritus; in many places he has done nothing more than tranſlate him. He muſt be allowed, however, to have imitated him with great judgment, and in ſome reſpects to have improved upon him. For Theocritus, it cannot be denied, deſcends ſometimes into ideas that are groſs and mean, and makes his ſhepherds abuſive and immodeſt; whereas Virgil is free from offenſive ruſticity, and

German had made us acquainted in this country with Geſner's Idylls, in which the ideas that had occurred to me for the improvement of Paſtoral Poetry, are fully realized.

LECT. XXXIX.

at the ſame time preſerves the character of paſtoral ſimplicity. The ſame diſtinction obtains between Theocritus and Virgil, as between many other of the Greek and Roman writers. The Greek led the way, followed nature more cloſely, and ſhowed more original genius. The Roman diſcovered more of the poliſh, and correctneſs of art. We have a few remains of other two Greek Poets in the Paſtoral Style, Moſchus and Bion, which have very conſiderable merit; and if they want the ſimplicity of Theocritus, excel him in tenderneſs and delicacy.

THE modern Writers of Paſtorals have, generally, contented themſelves with copying, or imitating, the deſcriptions and ſentiments of the antient Poets. Sannazarius, indeed, a famous Latin Poet, in the age of Leo X. attempted a bold innovation. He compoſed Piſcatory Eclogues; changing the ſcene from Woods to the Sea, and from the life of Shepherds to that of Fiſhermen. But the innovation was ſo unhappy, that he has gained no followers. For the life of Fiſhermen is, obviouſly, much more hard and toilſome than that of Shepherds, and preſents to the fancy much leſs agreeable images. Flocks, and trees, and flowers, are objects of greater beauty, and more generally reliſhed by men, than fiſhes

LECT. XXXIX.

fiſhes and marine productions. Of all the Moderns, M. Geſner, a Poet of Switzerland, has been the moſt ſucceſsful in his Paſtoral Compoſitions. He has introduced into his Idylls (as he entitles them) many new ideas. His rural ſcenery is often ſtriking, and his deſcriptions are lively. He preſents Paſtoral life to us, with all the embelliſhments of which it is ſuſceptible; but without any exceſs of refinement. What forms the chief merit of this Poet, is, that he writes to the heart; and has enriched the ſubjects of his Idylls with incidents, which give riſe to much tender ſentiment. Scenes of domeſtic felicity are beautifully painted. The mutual affection of huſbands and wives, of parents and children, of brothers and ſiſters, as well as of lovers, are diſplayed in a pleaſing and touching manner. From not underſtanding the language in which M. Geſner writes, I can be no judge of the Poetry of his Style: but, in the ſubject and conduct of his Paſtorals, he appears to me to have outdone all the Moderns.

NEITHER Mr. Pope's, nor Mr. Philips's Paſtorals, do any great honour to the Engliſh Poetry. Mr. Pope's were compoſed in his youth; which may be an apology for other faults, but cannot well excuſe the barrenneſs that appears in them. They are written in

LECT. XXXIX.

remarkably ſmooth and flowing numbers: and this is their chief merit; for there is ſcarcely any thought in them which can be called his own; ſcarcely any deſcription, or any image of nature, which has the marks of being original, or copied from nature herſelf; but a repetition of the common images that are to be found in Virgil, and in all Poets who write of rural themes. Philips attempted to be more ſimple and natural than Pope; but he wanted genius to ſupport his attempt, or to write agreeably. He, too, runs on the common and beaten topics; and endeavouring to be ſimple, he becomes flat and inſipid. There was no ſmall competition between theſe two Authors, at the time when their Paſtorals were publiſhed. In ſome papers of the *Guardian*, great partiality was ſhown to Philips, and high praiſe beſtowed upon him. Mr. Pope, reſenting this preference, under a feigned name procured a Paper to be inſerted in the *Guardian*, wherein he ſeemingly carries on the plan of extolling Philips; but in reality ſatiriſes him moſt ſeverely with ironical praiſes; and, in an artful covered manner, gives the palm to himſelf*. About the ſame time, Mr. Gay publiſhed his Shepherd's Week, in Six Paſtorals, which are deſigned to ridicule that ſort of ſimplicity which Philips and his partizans extolled, and

* See Guardian, No. 40.

are,

are, indeed, an ingenious burleſque of Paſtoral Writing, when it riſes no higher than the manners of modern clowns and ruſtics. Mr. Shenſtone's Paſtoral Ballad, in four parts, may juſtly be reckoned, I think, one of the moſt elegant Poems of this kind, which we have in Engliſh.

I HAVE not yet mentioned one form in which Paſtoral Writing has appeared in latter ages, that is, when extended into a Play, or regular Drama, where plot, characters, and paſſions, are joined with the ſimplicity and innocence of rural manners. This is the chief improvement which the Moderns have made on this ſpecies of Compoſition; and of this nature, we have two Italian Pieces which are much celebrated, Guarini's Paſtor Fido, and Taſſo's Aminta. Both of theſe poſſeſs great beauties, and are entitled to the reputation they have gained. To the latter, the preference ſeems due, as being leſs intricate in the plot and conduct, and leſs ſtrained and affected in the ſentiments; and though not wholly free from Italian refinement (of which I already gave one inſtance, the worſt, indeed, that occurs in all the Poem), it is, on the whole, a performance of high merit. The ſtrain of the Poetry is gentle and pleaſing; and the Italian language contributes to add

LECT. XXXIX.

much of that ſoftneſs, which is peculiarly ſuited to Paſtoral*.

I MUST

* It may be proper to take notice here, that the charge againſt Taſſo for his points and conceits, has ſometimes been carried too far. Mr. Addiſon, for inſtance, in a Paper of the Guardian, cenſuring his Aminta, gives this example, "That Sylvia enters adorned with a garland of "flowers, and after viewing herſelf in a fountain, breaks "out in a ſpeech to the flowers on her head, and tells "them, that ſhe did not wear them to adorn herſelf, but "to make them aſhamed." "Whoever can bear this," he adds, "may be aſſured, that he has no taſte for Paſto-"ral." Guard. No. 38. But Taſſo's Sylvia, in truth, makes no ſuch ridiculous figure, and we are obliged to ſuſpect that Mr. Addiſon had not read the Aminta. Daphne, a companion of Sylvia, appears in converſation with Thyrſis, the confident of Aminta, Sylvia's lover, and in order to ſhew him, that Sylvia was not ſo ſimple, or inſenſible to her own charms, as ſhe affected to be, gives him this inſtance; that ſhe had caught her one day adjuſting her dreſs by a fountain, and applying now one flower, and now another to her neck; and after comparing their colours with her own, ſhe broke into a ſmile, as if ſhe had ſeemed to ſay, I will wear you, not for my ornaments, but to ſhew how much you yield to me: and when caught thus admiring herſelf, ſhe threw away her flowers, and bluſhed for ſhame.——This deſcription of the vanity of a rural coquette, is no more than what is natural, and very different from what the Author of the Guardian repreſents it.

This cenſure on Taſſo was not originally Mr. Addiſon's. Bouhours, in his *Manière de bien penſer dans les ouvrages d'eſprit*, appears to have been the firſt who gave this miſrepreſentation of Sylvia's Speech, and founded a criticiſm on it. Fontenelle, in his Diſcourſe on Paſtoral Poetry, followed him in this criticiſm. Mr. Addiſon, or whoever was the Author of that Paper in the Guardian, copied from them

LECT. XXXIX.

I MUST not omit the mention of another Paſtoral Drama, which will bear being brought into

them both. Mr. Warton, in the Prefatory Diſcourſe to his Tranſlation of Virgil's Eclogues, repeats the obſervation. Sylvia's Speech to the Flowers, with which ſhe was adorned, is always quoted as the flagrant inſtance of the falſe taſte of the Italian Poets. Whereas, Taſſo gives us no ſuch Speech of Sylvia's, but only informs us of what her companion ſuppoſed her to be thinking, or ſaying to herſelf, when ſhe was privately admiring her own beauty. After charging ſo many eminent Critics, for having fallen into this ſtrange inaccuracy, from copying one another, without looking into the Author whom they cenſure, it is neceſſary for me to inſert the paſſage which has occaſioned this remark. Daphne ſpeaks thus to Thyrſis:

Hora per dirti il ver, non mi reſolvo
Si Silvia è ſemplicetta, come pare
A le parole, a gli atti. Hier vidi un ſegno
Che me ne mette in dubbio. Io la trovai
Là preſſo la cittade in quei gran prati,
Ove fra ſtagni grace un iſoletta,
Sovra eſſa un lago limpido e tranquillo,
Tutta pendente in atto, che parea
Vagheggiar ſe medeſma, e' inſieme inſieme
Chieder conſiglio à l'acque, in qual maniera
Diſpor doveſſe in ſu la fronte i crini,
E ſovra i crini il velo, e ſovrà velo
I fior, che tenea in grembo; e ſpeſſo ſpeſſo
Hor prendeva un liguſtro, hor una roſa,
E l'accoſtava al bel candido collo,
A le guancie vermiglie, e de colori
Fea paragone; e poi, ſicome lieta
De la vittoria, lampeggiava un riſo
Che parea che diceſſe: io pur vi vinco;
Ni porto voi per ornamento mio.

LECT. XXXIX.

into compariſon with any Compoſition of this kind, in any language; that is, Allan Ramſay's Gentle Shepherd. It is a great diſadvantage to this beautiful Poem, that it is written in the old ruſtic dialect of Scotland, which, in a ſhort time, will probably be entirely obſolete, and not intelligible; and it is a farther diſadvantage, that it is ſo entirely formed on the rural manners of Scotland, that none but a native of that country can thoroughly underſtand, or reliſh it. But, though ſubject to theſe local diſadvantages, which confine its reputation within narrow limits, it is full of ſo much natural deſcription, and tender ſentiment, as would do honour to any Poet. The characters are well drawn, the incidents affecting, the ſcenery and manners lively and juſt. It affords a ſtrong proof, both of the power which nature and ſimplicity poſſeſs, to reach the heart in every ſort of Writing; and of the variety of pleaſing characters and ſubjects, with which Paſtoral Poetry, when properly managed, is capable of being enlivened.

Ma porto voi ſol per vergogna voſtra,
Perche ſi veggia quanto mi cedete.
Ma mentre ella s'ornava, e vagheggiava
Rivolſi gli occhi a caſo, e ſi fu accorta
Ch'io di la m' era accorta, e vergognando,
Rizzoſi toſto, e i fior laſciò cadere;
In tanto io piu ridea del ſuo roſſore,
Ella piu s'arroſſia del riſo mio.

AMINTA. ATTO II. Sc. ii.

LECT. XXXIX.

I PROCEED next, to treat of Lyric Poetry, or the Ode; a ſpecies of Poetical Compoſition which poſſeſſes much dignity, and in which many Writers have diſtinguiſhed themſelves, in every age. Its peculiar character is, that it is intended to be ſung, or accompanied with muſic. Its deſignation implies this. Ode is, in Greek, the ſame with Song or Hymn; and Lyric Poetry imports, that the Verſes are accompanied with a lyre, or muſical inſtrument. This diſtinction was not, at firſt, peculiar to any one ſpecies of Poetry. For, as I obſerved in the laſt Lecture, Muſic and Poetry were coëval, and were, originally, always joined together. But after their ſeparation took place, after Bards had begun to make Verſe Compoſitions, which were to be recited or read, not to be ſung, ſuch Poems as were deſigned to be ſtill joined with Muſic or Song, were, by way of diſtinction, called Odes.

IN the Ode, therefore, Poetry retains its firſt and moſt antient form; that form, under which the original Bards poured forth their enthuſiaſtic ſtrains, praiſed their Gods and their Heroes, celebrated their victories, and lamented their misfortunes. It is from this circumſtance, of the Ode's being ſuppoſed to retain its original union with Muſic, that we are to deduce the proper idea, and the peculiar qualities of this kind of Poetry. It is not diſtinguiſhed

LECT. XXXIX.

tinguiſhed from other kinds, by the ſubjects on which it is employed; for theſe may be extremely various. I know no diſtinction of ſubject that belongs to it, except that other Poems are often employed in the recital of actions, whereas ſentiments, of one kind or other, form, almoſt always, the ſubject of the Ode. But it is chiefly the ſpirit, the manner of its execution, that marks and characteriſes it. Muſic and Song naturally add to the warmth of Poetry. They tend to tranſport, in a higher degree, both the perſon who ſings, and the perſons who hear. They juſtify, therefore, a bolder and more paſſionate ſtrain, than can be ſupported in ſimple recitation. On this is formed the peculiar character of the Ode. Hence, the enthuſiaſm that belongs to it, and the liberties it is allowed to take, beyond any other ſpecies of Poetry. Hence, that neglect of regularity, thoſe digreſſions, and that diſorder which it is ſuppoſed to admit; and which, indeed, moſt Lyric Poets have not failed ſufficiently to exemplify in their practice.

The effects of Muſic upon the mind are chiefly two; to raiſe it above its ordinary ſtate, and fill it with high enthuſiaſtic emotions; or to ſoothe, and melt it into the gentle pleaſurable feelings. Hence, the Ode may either aſpire to the former character of the ſublime

LECT. XXXIX.

ſublime and noble, or it may deſcend to the latter of the pleaſant and the gay; and between theſe, there is, alſo, a middle region, of the mild and temperate emotions, which the Ode may often occupy to advantage.

All Odes may be compriſed under four denominations. Firſt, Sacred Odes; Hymns addreſſed to God, or compoſed on religious ſubjects. Of this nature are the Pſalms of David, which exhibit to us this ſpecies of Lyric Poetry, in its higheſt degree of perfection. Secondly, Heroic Odes, which are employed in the praiſe of heroes, and in the celebration of martial exploits and great actions. Of this kind are all Pindar's Odes, and ſome few of Horace's. Theſe two kinds ought to have ſublimity and elevation, for their reigning character. Thirdly, moral and philoſophical Odes, where the ſentiments are chiefly inſpired by virtue, friendſhip, and humanity. Of this kind, are many of Horace's Odes, and ſeveral of our beſt modern Lyric productions; and here the Ode poſſeſſes that middle region, which, as I obſerved, it ſometimes occupies. Fourthly, Feſtive and Amorous Odes, calculated merely for pleaſure and amuſement. Of this nature, are all Anacreon's; ſome of Horace's; and a great number of ſongs and modern productions, that claim to be of the Lyric ſpecies. The reigning character of theſe,

LECT. XXXIX.

theſe, ought to be elegance, ſmoothneſs, and gaiety.

One of the chief difficulties in compoſing Odes, ariſes from that enthuſiaſm which is underſtood to be a characteriſtic of Lyric Poetry. A profeſſed Ode, even of the moral kind, but more eſpecially if it attempt the ſublime, is expected to be enlivened and animated, in an uncommon degree. Full of this idea, the Poet, when he begins to write an Ode, if he has any real warmth of genius, is apt to deliver himſelf up to it, without controul or reſtraint; if he has it not, he ſtrains after it, and thinks himſelf bound to aſſume the appearance, of being all fervour, and all flame. In either caſe, he is in great hazard of becoming extravagant. The licentiouſneſs of writing without order, method, or connection, has infected the Ode more than any other ſpecies of Poetry. Hence, in the claſs of Heroic Odes, we find ſo few that one can read with pleaſure. The Poet is out of ſight, in a moment. He gets up into the clouds; becomes ſo abrupt in his tranſitions; ſo eccentric and irregular in his motions, and of courſe ſo obſcure, that we eſſay in vain to follow him, or to partake of his raptures. I do not require, that an Ode ſhould be as regular in the ſtructure of its parts, as a Didactic, or an Epic Poem. But ſtill, in every Compoſition, there ought

LECT. XXXIX.

ought to be a ſubject; there ought to be parts which make up a whole; there ſhould be a connection of thoſe parts with one another. The tranſitions from thought to thought may be light and delicate, ſuch as are prompted by a lively fancy; but ſtill they ſhould be ſuch as preſerve the connection of ideas, and ſhow the Author to be one who thinks, and not one who raves. Whatever authority may be pleaded for the incoherence and diſorder of Lyric Poetry, nothing can be more certain, than that any compoſition which is ſo irregular in its method, as to become obſcure to the bulk of Readers, is ſo much worſe upon that account*.

THE

* "La plupart des ceux qui parlent de l'enthouſiaſme de "l'ode, en parlent comme s'ils étoient eux-mêmes dans le "trouble qu'ils veulent definir. Ce ne ſont que grands "mots de fureur divine, de tranſports de l'âme, de mouve-"mens, de lumières, qui mis bout-à-bout dans des phraſes "pompeuſes, ne produiſent pourtant aucune idée diſtincte. "Si on les en croit, l'eſſence de l'enthouſiaſme eſt de ne "pouvoir être compris que par les eſprits du prémier ordre, "à la tête deſquels ils ſe ſuppoſent, et dont ils excluent "tous ceux que ôſent ne les pas entendre.—Le beau "déſordre l'ode eſt un effet de l'art; mais il faut prendre "garde de donner trop d'étendue à ce terme. On auto-"riſeroit par la tous les écarts imaginables. Un poëte "n'auroit plus qu'à exprimer avec force toutes les penſées "qui lui viendroient ſucceſſivement; il ſe tiendroit diſpenſé "d'en examiner le rapport, et de ſe faire un plan, dont "toutes les parties ſe pretaſſent mutuellement des beautés. "Il n'y auroit ni commencement, ni milieu, ni fin, dans "ſon

LECT. XXXIX.

THE extravagant liberty which ſeveral of the modern Lyric Writers aſſume to themſelves in their Verſification, increaſes the diſorder of this ſpecies of Poetry. They prolong their periods to ſuch a degree, they wander through ſo many different meaſures, and employ ſuch a variety of long and ſhort lines, correſponding in rhyme at ſo great a diſtance from each other, that all ſenſe of melody is utterly loſt. Whereas Lyric Compoſition ought, beyond every other ſpecies of Poetry, to pay attention to melody and beauty of ſound; and the Verſification of thoſe Odes may be juſtly accounted the beſt, which renders the harmony of the meaſure moſt ſenſible to every common ear.

PINDAR, the great Father of Lyric Poetry, has been the occaſion of leading his imitators into ſome of the defects I have now mentioned. His genius was ſublime; his expreſſions are beautiful and happy; his deſcriptions pictureſque. But finding it a very barren ſubject

" ſon ouvrage; et cependant l'auteur ſe croiroit d'autant " plus ſublime, qu'il ſeroit moins raiſonable. Mais qui " produiroit une pareille compoſition dans l'eſprit du lec- " teur? Elle ne laiſſeroit qu'un étourdiſſement, cauſé par " la magnificence et l'harmonie des paroles, ſans y faire " naître que des idées confuſes, qui chaſſeroient l'une ou " l'autre, au lieu de concourir enſemble à fixer et à eclairer " l'eſprit." OEUVRES DE M. DE LA MOTTE, Tome I. Diſcours ſur l'Ode.

to

LECT. XXXIX.

to ſing the praiſes of thoſe who had gained the prize in the public games, he is perpetually digreſſive, and fills up his Poems with Fables of the Gods and Heroes, that have little connection either with his ſubject, or with one another. The Antients admired him greatly; but as many of the hiſtories of particular families and cities, to which he alludes, are now unknown to us, he is ſo obſcure, partly from his ſubjects, and partly from his rapid, abrupt manner of treating them, that, notwithſtanding the beauty of his expreſſion, our pleaſure in reading him is much diminiſhed. One would imagine, that many of his modern imitators thought the beſt way to catch his ſpirit, was to imitate his diſorder and obſcurity. In ſeveral of the choruſes of Euripides and Sophocles, we have the ſame kind of Lyric Poetry as in Pindar, carried on with more clearneſs and connection, and at the ſame time with much ſublimity.

Of all the writers of Odes, Antient or Modern, there is none, that, in point of correctneſs, harmony, and happy expreſſion, can vie with Horace. He has deſcended from the Pindaric rapture to a more moderate degree of elevation; and joins connected thought, and good ſenſe, with the higheſt beauties of Poetry. He does not often aſpire beyond that middle region, which I mentioned as belonging

LECT. XXXIX.

longing to the Ode; and thoſe Odes, in which he attempts the ſublime, are perhaps not always his beſt*. The peculiar character, in which he excels, is grace and elegance; and in this Style of Compoſition, no Poet has ever attained to a greater perfection than Horace. No Poet ſupports a moral ſentiment with more dignity, touches a gay one more happily, or poſſeſſes the art of trifling more agreeably, when he chuſes to trifle. His language is ſo fortunate, that with a ſingle word or epithet, he often conveys a whole deſcription to the fancy. Hence he ever has been, and ever will continue to be, a favourite Author with all perſons of taſte.

Among the Latin Poets of later ages, there have been many imitators of Horace. One of the moſt diſtinguiſhed is Caſimir, a Poliſh Poet of the laſt century, who wrote four books of Odes. In graceful eaſe of expreſſion, he is far inferior to the Roman. He oftener affects the ſublime; and in the attempt, like other

* There is no Ode whatever of Horace's, without great beauties. But though I may be ſingular in my opinion, I cannot help thinking that in ſome of thoſe Odes which have been much admired for ſublimity (ſuch as Ode iv. Lib. 4. "Qualem miniſtrum fulminis alitem," &c) there appears ſomewhat of a ſtrained and forced effort to be lofty. The genius of this amiable Poet ſhows itſelf, according to my judgment, to greater advantage, in themes of a more temperate kind.

Lyric

Lyric writers, frequently becomes harſh and unnatural. But, on ſeveral occaſions, he diſcovers a conſiderable degree of original genius, and poetical fire. Buchanan, in ſome of his Lyric Compoſitions, is very elegant and claſſical.

Among the French, the Odes of Jean Baptiſte Rouſſeau, have been much, and juſtly celebrated. They poſſeſs great beauty, both of ſentiment and expreſſion. They are animated, without being rhapſodical; and are not inferior to any poetical productions in the French language.

In our own Language, we have ſeveral Lyric Compoſitions of conſiderable merit. Dryden's Ode on St. Cecilia, is well known. Mr. Gray is diſtinguiſhed in ſome of his Odes, both for tenderneſs and ſublimity; and in Dodſley's Miſcellanies, ſeveral very beautiful Lyric Poems are to be found. As to profeſſed Pindaric Odes, they are, with a few exceptions, ſo incoherent, as ſeldom to be intelligible. Cowley, at all times harſh, is doubly ſo in his Pindaric Compoſitions. In his Anacreontic Odes, he is much happier. They are ſmooth and elegant; and, indeed, the moſt agreeable, and the moſt perfect, in their kind, of all Mr. Cowley's Poems.

LECTURE XL.

DIDACTIC POETRY—DESCRIPTIVE POETRY.

LECT. XL.

HAVING treated of Paſtoral and Lyric Poetry, I proceed next to Didactic Poetry; under which is included a numerous Claſs of Writings. The ultimate end of all Poetry, indeed, of every Compoſition, ſhould be, to make ſome uſeful impreſſion on the mind. This uſeful impreſſion is moſt commonly made in Poetry, by indirect methods; as by fable, by narration, by repreſentation of characters; but Didactic Poetry openly profeſſes its intention of conveying knowledge and inſtruction. It differs, therefore, in the form only, not in the ſcope and ſubſtance, from a philoſophical, a moral, or a critical treatiſe in Proſe. At the ſame time, by means of its form, it has ſeveral advantages over Proſe Inſtruction. By the charm of Verſification and Numbers, it renders inſtruction more agreeable; by the deſcriptions, epiſodes, and other embelliſhments, which it may interweave, it detains, and engages the fancy; it fixes

fixes alſo uſeful circumſtances more deeply in the memory. Hence, it is a field, wherein a Poet may gain great honour, may diſplay both much genius, and much knowledge and judgment.

It may be executed in different manners. The Poet may chooſe ſome inſtructive ſubject, and he may treat it regularly, and in form; or, without intending a great or regular work, he may only inveigh againſt particular vices, or make ſome moral obſervations on human life and characters, as is commonly done in Satires and Epiſtles. All theſe come under the denomination of Didactic Poetry.

The higheſt ſpecies of it, is a regular treatiſe on ſome philoſophical, grave, or uſeful ſubject. Of this nature we have ſeveral, both ancient and modern, of great merit and character: ſuch as Lucretius's ſix Books De Rerum Natura, Virgil's Georgics, Pope's Eſſay on Criticiſm, Akenſide's Pleaſures of the Imagination, Armſtrong on Health, Horace's, Vida's, and Boileau's Art of Poetry.

In all ſuch works, as inſtruction is the profeſſed object, the fundamental merit conſiſts in ſound thought, juſt principles, clear and apt illuſtrations. The Poet muſt inſtruct; but he muſt ſtudy, at the ſame time, to enliven his in-

LECT. XL.

ſtructions, by the introduction of ſuch figures, and ſuch circumſtances, as may amuſe the imagination, may conceal the dryneſs of his ſubject, and embelliſh it with poetical painting. Virgil, in his Georgics, preſents us here with a perfect model. He has the art of raiſing and beautifying the moſt trivial circumſtances in rural life. When he is going to ſay, that the labour of the country muſt begin in ſpring, he expreſſes himſelf thus:

Verè novo, gelidus canis cum montibus humor
Liquitur, et Zephyro putris ſe gleba reſolvit;
Depreſſo incipiat jam tum mihi Taurus aratro
Ingemere, & ſulco attritus ſplendeſcere vomer*.

INSTEAD of telling his huſbandman in plain language, that his crops will fail through bad management, his language is,

Heu magnum alterius fruſtra ſpectabis acervum,
Concuſſâque famem in ſylvis ſolabere quercu†.

---

* While yet the Spring is young, while Earth unbinds
Her frozen boſom to the weſtern winds;
While mountain ſnows diſſolve againſt the Sun,
And ſtreams yet new from precipices run;
Ev'n in this early dawning of the year,
Produce the plough and yoke the ſturdy ſteer,
And goad him till he groans beneath his toil,
Till the bright ſhare is buried in the ſoil. DRYDEN.

† On others crops you may with envy look,
And ſhake for food the long abandon'd oak.
DRYDEN.

INSTEAD

LECT. XL.

INSTEAD of ordering him to water his grounds, he preſents us with a beautiful landſcape:

Ecce ſupercilio clivoſi tramitis undam
Elicit; illa cadens, raucum per lævia murmur
Saxa ciet; ſcatebriſque arentia temperat arva*.

IN all Didactic Works, method and order is eſſentially requiſite; not ſo ſtrict and formal as in a Proſe Treatiſe; yet ſuch as may exhibit clearly to the Reader a connected train of inſtruction. Of the Didactic Poets, whom I before mentioned, Horace, in his Art of Poetry, is the one moſt cenſured for want of method. Indeed, if Horace be deficient in any thing throughout many of his Writings, it is in this, of not being ſufficiently attentive to juncture and connection of parts. He writes always with eaſe and gracefulneſs; but often in a manner ſomewhat looſe and rambling. There is, however, in that work, much good ſenſe, and excellent criticiſm; and, if it be

* Behold when burning ſuns, or Syrius' beams
Strike fiercely on the field and with'ring ſtems,
Down from the ſummit of the neighbouring hills,
O'er the ſmooth ſtones he calls the bubbling rills;
Soon as he clears whate'er their paſſage ſtay'd,
And marks their future current with his ſpade,
Before him ſcattering they prevent his pains,
And roll with hollow murmurs o'er the plains.
WARTON.

LECT. XL.

conſidered as intended for the regulation of the Roman Drama, which ſeems to have been the Author's chief purpoſe, it will be found to be a more complete and regular treatiſe, than under the common notion, of its being a Syſtem of the whole Poetical Art.

With regard to Epiſodes and Embelliſhments, great liberty is allowed to Writers of Didactic Poetry. We ſoon tire of a continued ſeries of inſtructions, eſpecially in a poetical work, where we look for entertainment. The great art of rendering a Didactic Poem intereſting, is to relieve and amuſe the Reader, by connecting ſome agreeable Epiſodes with the principal ſubject. Theſe are always the parts of the work which are beſt known, and which contribute moſt to ſupport the reputation of the Poet. The principal beauties of Virgil's Georgics lie in digreſſions of this kind, in which the Author has exerted all the force of his genius; ſuch as the prodigies that attended the death of Julius Cæſar, the Praiſes of Italy, the Happineſs of a Country Life, the Fable of Ariſteus, and the moving Tale of Orpheus and Eurydice. In like manner the favourite paſſages in Lucretius's work, and which alone could render ſuch a dry and abſtract ſubject tolerable in Poetry, are the digreſſions on the Evils of Superſtition, the Praiſe of Epicurus and his Philoſophy, the

LECT. XL.

Deſcription of the Plague, and ſeveral other incidental illuſtrations, which are remarkably elegant, and adorned with a ſweetneſs and harmony of Verſification peculiar to that Poet. There is indeed nothing in Poetry, ſo entertaining or deſcriptive, but what a Didactic Writer of genius may be allowed to introduce in ſome part of his work; provided always, that ſuch Epiſodes ariſe naturally from the main ſubject; that they be not diſproportioned in length to it; and that the Author know how to deſcend with propriety to the plain, as well as how to riſe to the bold and figured Style.

Much art may be ſhewn by a Didactic Poet, in connecting his Epiſodes happily with his ſubject. Virgil is alſo diſtinguiſhed for his addreſs in this point. After ſeeming to have left his huſbandmen, he again returns to them very naturally, by laying hold of ſome rural circumſtance, to terminate his digreſſion. Thus, having ſpoken of the battle of Pharſalia, he ſubjoins immediately, with much art:

Scilicet et tempus veniet, cum finibus illis,
Agricola, incurvo terram molitus aratro,
Exeſa inveniet ſcabrâ rubigine pila:
Aut gravibus raſtris galeas pulſabit inanes,
Grandiaque effoſſis mirabitur oſſa ſepulchris *.

In

* Then, after length of time, the lab'ring ſwains
Who turn the turf of theſe unhappy plains,

LECT. XL.

In Engliſh, Dr. Akenſide has attempted the moſt rich and poetical form of Didactic Writing, in his Pleaſures of the Imagination; and though, in the execution of the whole, he is not equal, he has, in ſeveral parts, ſucceeded happily, and diſplayed much genius. Dr. Armſtrong, in his Art of Preſerving Health, has not aimed at ſo high a ſtrain as the other; but he is more equal, and maintains throughout a chaſte, and correct elegance.

Satires and Epiſtles naturally run into a more familiar Style, than ſolemn Philoſophical Poetry. As the manners and characters, which occur in ordinary life, are their ſubject, they require being treated with ſomewhat of the eaſe and freedom of converſation; and hence it is commonly the "muſa pedeſtris," which reigns in ſuch Compoſitions.

Satire, in its firſt ſtate among the Romans, had a form different from what it afterwards aſſumed. Its origin is obſcure, and has given occaſion to altercation among Critics. It ſeems to have been at firſt a relic of the Antient Comedy, written partly in Proſe,

---

Shall ruſty arms from the plough'd furrows take,
And over empty helmets paſs the rake;
Amuſed at antique titles on the ſtones,
And mighty relics of gigantic bones. Dryden.

partly

LECT. XL.

partly in Verſe, and abounding with ſcurrility. Ennius and Lucilius corrected its groſſneſs; and at laſt, Horace brought it into that form, which now gives the denomination to Satirical Writing. Reformation of manners, is the end which it profeſſes to have in view; and in order to this end, it aſſumes the liberty of boldly cenſuring vice, and vicious characters. It has been carried on in three different manners, by the three great Antient Satiriſts, Horace, Juvenal, and Perſius. Horace's Style has not much elevation. He entitled his Satires, "Sermones," and ſeems not to have intended riſing much higher than Proſe put into numbers. His manner is eaſy and graceful. They are rather the follies and weakneſſes of mankind, than their enormous vices, which he chuſes for the object of his Satire. He reproves with a ſmiling aſpect; and while he moralizes like a ſound Philoſopher, diſcovers, at the ſame time, the politeneſs of a courtier. Juvenal is much more ſerious and declamatory. He has more ſtrength and fire, and more elevation of Style, than Horace; but is greatly inferior to him in gracefulneſs and eaſe. His Satire is more zealous, more ſharp and pointed, as being generally directed againſt more flagitious characters. As Scaliger ſays of him, "ardet, "inſtat, jugulat;" whereas Horace's character is, "admiſſus circum præcordia ludit." Perſius

LECT. XL.

ſius has a greater reſemblance of the force and fire of Juvenal, than of the politeneſs of Horace. He is diſtinguiſhed for ſentiments of noble and ſublime morality. He is a nervous and lively writer; but withal, often harſh and obſcure.

Poetical Epiſtles, when employed on moral or critical ſubjects, ſeldom riſe into a higher ſtrain of Poetry than Satires. In the form of an Epiſtle, indeed, many other ſubjects may be handled, and either Love Poetry, or Elegiac, may be carried on; as in Ovid's Epiſtolæ Heroidum, and his Epiſtolæ de Ponto. Such works as theſe are deſigned to be merely ſentimental; and as their merit conſiſts in being proper expreſſions of the paſſion or ſentiment which forms the ſubject, they may aſſume any tone of Poetry that is ſuited to it. But Didactic Epiſtles, of which I now ſpeak, ſeldom admit of much elevation. They are commonly intended as obſervations on Authors, or on Life and Characters; in delivering which, the Poet does not purpoſe to compoſe a formal treatiſe, or to confine himſelf ſtrictly to regular method; but gives ſcope to his genius on ſome particular theme, which, at the time, has prompted him to write. In all Didactic Poetry of this kind, it is an important rule "quicquid precipies, eſto brevis." Much of the grace, both of Satirical and Epiſtolary

LECT. XL.

Epiſtolary Writing, conſiſts in a ſpirited conciſeneſs. This gives to ſuch compoſition an edge and a livelineſs, which ſtrike the fancy, and keep attention awake. Much of their merit depends alſo on juſt and happy repreſentations of characters. As they are not ſupported by thoſe high beauties of deſcriptive and poetical language which adorn other compoſitions, we expect, in return, to be entertained with lively paintings of men and manners, which are always pleaſing; and in theſe, a certain ſprightlineſs and turn of wit finds its proper place. The higher ſpecies of Poetry ſeldom admit it; but here it is ſeaſonable and beautiful.

In all theſe reſpects, Mr. Pope's Ethical Epiſtles deſerve to be mentioned with ſignal honour, as a model, next to perfect, of this kind of Poetry. Here, perhaps, the ſtrength of his genius appeared. In the more ſublime parts of Poetry, he is not ſo diſtinguiſhed. In the enthuſiaſm, the fire, the force and copiouſneſs of poetic genius, Dryden, though a much leſs correct Writer, appears to have been ſuperior to him. One can ſcarce think that he was capable of Epic or Tragic Poetry; but within a certain limited region, he has been outdone by no Poet. His tranſlation of the Iliad will remain a laſting monument to his honour, as the moſt elegant and highly finiſhed tranſlation, that, perhaps, ever was given of any poetical work. That he was not incapable of

LECT. XL.

of tender Poetry, appears from the epiſtle of Eloiſa to Abelard, and from the verſes to the memory of an Unfortunate Lady, which are almoſt his only ſentimental productions; and which indeed are excellent in their kind. But the qualities for which he is chiefly diſtinguiſhed are, judgment and wit, with a conciſe and happy expreſſion, and a melodious verſification. Few Poets ever had more wit, and at the ſame time more judgment, to direct the proper employment of that wit. This renders his Rape of the Lock the greateſt maſter-piece that perhaps was ever compoſed, in the gay and ſprightly Style; and in his ſerious works, ſuch as his Eſſay on Man, and his Ethic Epiſtles, his wit juſt diſcovers itſelf as much, as to give a proper ſeaſoning to grave reflections. His imitations of Horace are ſo peculiarly happy, that one is at a loſs, whether moſt to admire the original or the copy; and they are among the few imitations extant, that have all the grace and eaſe of an original. His paintings of characters are natural and lively in a high degree; and never was any Writer ſo happy in that conciſe ſpirited Style, which gives animation to Satires and Epiſtles. We are never ſo ſenſible of the good effects of rhyme in Engliſh verſe, as in reading theſe parts of his works. We ſee it adding to the Style, an elevation which otherwiſe it could not have poſſeſſed; while at the ſame time he manages

manages it ſo artfully, that it never appears in the leaſt to encumber him; but, on the contrary, ſerves to increaſe the livelineſs of his manner. He tells us himſelf, that he could expreſs moral obſervations more conciſely, and therefore more forcibly, in rhyme, than he could do in proſe.

Among moral and Didactic Poets, Dr. Young is of too great eminence, to be paſſed over without notice. In all his works, the marks of ſtrong genius appear. His Univerſal Paſſion, poſſeſſes the full merit of that animated conciſeneſs of Style, and lively deſcription of characters, which I mentioned as particularly requiſite in Satirical and Didactic Compoſitions. Though his wit may often be thought too ſparkling, and his ſentences too pointed, yet the vivacity of his fancy is ſo great, as to entertain every Reader. In his Night Thoughts, there is much energy of expreſſion; in the three firſt, there are ſeveral pathetic paſſages; and ſcattered through them all, happy images and alluſions, as well as pious reflections, occur. But the ſentiments are frequently over-ſtrained, and turgid; and the Style is too harſh and obſcure to be pleaſing. Among French Authors, Boileau has undoubtedly much merit in Didactic Poetry. Their later Critics are unwilling to allow him any great ſhare of original genius, or poetic fire.

LECT. XL.

fire*. But his Art of Poetry, his Satires and Epiſtles, muſt ever be eſteemed eminent, not only for ſolid and judicious thought, but for correct and elegant poetical expreſſion, and fortunate imitation of the Antients.

From Didactic, I proceed next to treat of Deſcriptive Poetry, where the higheſt exertions of genius may be diſplayed. By Deſcriptive Poetry, I do not mean any one particular ſpecies or form of Compoſition. There are few Compoſitions of any length, that can be called purely deſcriptive, or wherein the Poet propoſes to himſelf no other object, but merely to deſcribe, without employing narration, action, or moral ſentiment, as the ground-work of his Piece. Deſcription is generally introduced as an embelliſhment, rather than made the ſubject, of a regular work. But though it ſeldom form a ſeparate ſpecies of writing, yet into every ſpecies of Poetical Compoſition, Paſtoral, Lyric, Didactic, Epic, and Dramatic, it both enters, and poſſeſſes in each of them a very conſiderable place; ſo that in treating of Poetry, it demands no ſmall attention.

Description is the great teſt of a Poet's imagination; and always diſtinguiſhes an

* Vid. Poëtique Françoiſe de Marmontel.

original

LECT. XL.

original from a ſecond-rate Genius. To a Writer of the inferior claſs, nature, when at any time he attempts to deſcribe it, appears exhauſted by thoſe who have gone before him in the ſame track. He ſees nothing new, or peculiar, in the object which he would paint; his conceptions of it are looſe and vague; and his expreſſions, of courſe, feeble and general. He gives us words rather than ideas; we meet with the language indeed of poetical deſcription, but we apprehend the object deſcribed very indiſtinctly. Whereas, a true Poet makes us imagine that we ſee it before our eyes; he catches the diſtinguiſhing features; he gives it the colours of life and reality; he places it in ſuch a light, that a Painter could copy after him. This happy talent is chiefly owing to a ſtrong imagination, which firſt receives a lively impreſſion of the object; and then, by employing a proper ſelection of circumſtances in deſcribing it, tranſmits that impreſſion in its full force to the imagination of others.

In this ſelection of circumſtances, lies the great art of Picturesque Deſcription. In the firſt place, they ought not to be vulgar, and common ones, ſuch as are apt to paſs by without remark; but, as much as poſſible, new and original, which may catch the fancy, and draw attention. In the next place, they ought

to

LECT. XL.

to be ſuch as particularize the object deſcribed, and mark it ſtrongly. No deſcription, that reſts in generals, can be good. For we can conceive nothing clearly in the abſtract; all diſtinct ideas are formed upon particulars. In the third place, all the circumſtances employed ought to be uniform, and of a piece; that is, when deſcribing a great object, every circumſtance brought into view ſhould tend to aggrandize; or, when deſcribing a gay and pleaſant one, ſhould tend to beautify, that by this means, the impreſſion may reſt upon the imagination complete and entire; and laſtly, the circumſtances in deſcription ſhould be expreſſed with conciſeneſs, and with ſimplicity; for when either too much exaggerated, or too long dwelt upon and extended, they never fail to enfeeble the impreſſion that is deſigned to be made. Brevity, almoſt always, contributes to vivacity. Theſe general rules will be beſt underſtood by illuſtrations, founded on particular inſtances.

Of all profeſſed Deſcriptive Compoſitions, the largeſt and fulleſt that I am acquainted with, in any language, is Mr. Thomſon's Seaſons; a work which poſſeſſes very uncommon merit. The Style, in the midſt of much ſplendor and ſtrength, is ſometimes harſh, and may be cenſured as deficient in eaſe and diſtinctneſs. But, notwithſtanding this defect, Thomſon is a ſtrong and a beautiful Deſcriber; for he had a feeling

LECT. XL.

heart, and a warm imagination. He had ſtudied, and copied nature with care. Enamoured of her beauties, he not only deſcribed them properly, but felt their impreſſion with ſtrong ſenſibility. The impreſſion which he felt, he tranſmits to his Readers; and no perſon of taſte can peruſe any one of his Seaſons, without having the ideas and feelings which belong to that ſeaſon, recalled, and rendered preſent to his mind. Several inſtances of moſt beautiful deſcription might be given from him; ſuch as, the ſhower in Spring, the morning in Summer, and the man periſhing in ſnow in Winter. But, at preſent, I ſhall produce a paſſage of another kind, to ſhew the power of a ſingle well-choſen circumſtance, to heighten a deſcription. In his Summer, relating the effects of heat in the torrid zone, he is led to take notice of the peſtilence that deſtroyed the Engliſh fleet, at Carthagena, under Admiral Vernon; when he has the following lines:

——you, gallant Vernon, ſaw
The miſerable ſcene; you pitying ſaw
To infant weakneſs ſunk the warrior's arm;
Saw the deep racking pang; the ghaſtly form;
The lip pale quiv'ring; and the beamleſs eye
No more with ardour bright; you heard the groans
Of agonizing ſhips from ſhore to ſhore;
Heard nightly plunged, amid the ſullen waves,
The frequent corſe.—— L. 1050.

LECT. XL.

All the circumſtances here are properly choſen, for ſetting this diſmal ſcene in a ſtrong light before our eyes. But what is moſt ſtriking in the picture, is, the laſt image. We are conducted through all the ſcenes of diſtreſs, till we come to the mortality prevailing in the fleet, which a vulgar Poet would have deſcribed by exaggerated expreſſions, concerning the multiplied trophies and victories of death. But, how much more is the imagination impreſſed by this ſingle circumſtance, of dead bodies thrown overboard every night; of the conſtant ſound of their falling into the waters; and of the Admiral liſtening to this melancholy ſound, ſo often ſtriking his ear?

> Heard nightly plunged, amid the ſullen waves,
> The frequent corſe *.

Mr.

* The elogium which Dr. Johnſon, in his Lives of the Poets, gives of Thomſon, is high, and, in my opinion, very juſt: "As a Writer, he is entitled to one praiſe of the "higheſt kind; his mode of thinking, and of expreſſing "his thoughts, is original. His Blank Verſe is no more "the Blank Verſe of Milton, or of any other Poet, than "the Rhymes of Prior are the Rhymes of Cowley. His "numbers, his pauſes, his diction, are of his own growth, "without tranſcription, without imitation. He thinks in "a peculiar train, and he thinks always as a man of "genius. He looks round on nature and life, with the eye "which nature beſtows only on a Poet; the eye that diſ-"tinguiſhes in every thing preſented to its view, whatever "there is on which imagination can delight to be detained; "and with a mind, that at once comprehends the vaſt, and "attends to the minute. The Reader of the Seaſons won-

"ders

LECT. XL.

Mr. PARNELL's Tale of the Hermit, is conſpicuous, throughout the whole of it, for beautiful Deſcriptive Narration. The manner of the Hermit's ſetting forth to viſit the world; his meeting with a companion, and the houſes in which they are ſucceſſively entertained, of the vain man, the covetous man, and the good man, are pieces of very fine painting, touched with a light and delicate pencil, overcharged with no ſuperfluous colouring, and conveying to us a lively idea of the objects. But, of all the Engliſh Poems in the Deſcriptive Style, the richeſt and moſt remarkable are, Milton's Allegro and Penſeroſo. The collection of gay images on the one hand, and of melancholy ones on the other, exhibited in theſe two ſmall, but inimitably fine Poems, are as exquiſite as can be conceived. They

" ders that he never ſaw before what Thomſon ſhews him, " and that he never yet has felt what Thomſon impreſſes. " His deſcriptions of extended ſcenes, and general effects, " bring before us the whole magnificence of nature, whe- " ther pleaſing or dreadful. The gaiety of Spring, the " ſplendour of Summer, the tranquillity of Autumn, and " the horror of Winter, take, in their turn, poſſeſſion of the " mind. The Poet leads us through the appearances of " things, as they are ſucceſſively varied by the viciſſitudes " of the year, and imparts to us ſo much of his own enthu- " ſiaſm, that our thoughts expand with his imagery, and " kindle with his ſentiments." The cenſure which the ſame eminent Critic paſſes upon Thomſon's diction, is no leſs juſt and well-founded, that " it is too exuberant, and " may ſometimes be charged with filling the ear more than " the mind."

LECT. XL.

are, indeed, the ſtorehouſe whence many ſucceeding Poets have enriched their deſcriptions of ſimilar ſubjects; and they alone are ſufficient for illuſtrating the obſervations which I made, concerning the proper ſelection of circumſtances in Deſcriptive Writing. Take, for inſtance, the following paſſage from the Penſeroſo:

——I walk unſeen
On the dry, ſmooth-ſhaven green,
To behold the wandering moon,
Riding near her higheſt noon,
Like one that had been led aſtray,
Through the heaven's wide pathleſs way,
And oft, as if her head ſhe bow'd,
Stooping through a fleecy cloud.
Oft, on a plat of riſing ground,
I hear the far-off curfew ſound,
Over ſome wide watered ſhore,
Swinging ſlow with ſolemn roar:
Or, if the air will not permit,
Some ſtill removed place will fit,
Where glowing embers through the room
Teach light to counterfeit a gloom;
Far from all reſort of mirth,
Save the cricket on the hearth,
Or the bellman's drowſy charm,
To bleſs the doors from nightly harm;
Or let my lamp, at midnight hour,
Be ſeen in ſome high lonely tower,
Where I may outwatch the Bear
With thrice great Hermes, or unſphere
The ſpirit of Plato, to unfold
What worlds, or what vaſt regions hold

Th'

Th' immortal mind, that hath forſook
Her manſion in this fleſhly nook;
And of thoſe Dæmons that are found
In fire, air, flood, or under-ground.

HERE, there are no unmeaning general expreſſions; all is particular; all is pictureſque; nothing forced or exaggerated; but a ſimple Style, and a collection of ſtrong expreſſive images, which are all of one claſs, and recal a number of ſimilar ideas of the melancholy kind: particularly, the walk by moon-light; the ſound of the curfew bell heard diſtant; the dying embers in the chamber; the Bellman's call; and the lamp ſeen at midnight, in the high lonely tower. We may obſerve, too, the conciſeneſs of the Poet's manner. He does not reſt long on one circumſtance, or employ a great many words to deſcribe it; which always makes the impreſſion faint and languid; but placing it in one ſtrong point of view, full and clear before the Reader, he there leaves it.

"FROM his ſhield and his helmet," ſays Homer, deſcribing one of his heroes in battle, "From his ſhield and helmet, there ſparkled "an inceſſant blaze; like the autumnal ſtar, "when it appears in its brightneſs from the "waters of the ocean." This is ſhort and lively; but when it comes into Mr. Pope's hand, it evaporates in three pompous lines,

LECT. XL. each of which repeats the ſame image in different words:

> High on his helm celeſtial lightnings play,
> His beamy ſhield emits a living ray;
> Th' unwearied blaze inceſſant ſtreams ſupplies,
> Like the red ſtar that fires th' autumnal ſkies.

It is to be obſerved, in general, that, in deſcribing ſolemn or great objects, the conciſe manner is, almoſt always, proper. Deſcriptions of gay and ſmiling ſcenes can bear to be more amplified and prolonged; as ſtrength is not the predominant quality expected in theſe. But where a ſublime, or a pathetic impreſſion is intended to be made, energy is above all things required. The imagination ought then to be ſeized at once; and it is far more deeply impreſſed by one ſtrong and ardent image, than by the anxious minuteneſs of laboured illuſtration.—"His face was without form, and "dark," ſays Oſſian, deſcribing a ghoſt; "the "ſtars dim twinkled through his form; thrice "he ſighed over the hero; and thrice the "winds of the night roared around."

It deſerves attention too, that in deſcribing inanimate natural objects, the Poet, in order to enliven his deſcription, ought always to mix living beings with them. The ſcenes of dead and ſtill life are apt to pall upon us, if the Poet do not ſuggeſt ſentiments, and introduce life and action into his deſcription. This

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LECT. XL.

is well known to every Painter who is a maſter in his art. Seldom has any beautiful landſcape been drawn, without ſome human being repreſented on the canvas, as beholding it, or on ſome account concerned in it:

Hîc gelidi fontes, hîc mollia prata, Lycori,
Hîc nemus; hîc ipſo tecum conſumerer ævo *.

The touching part of theſe fine lines of Virgil's, is the laſt, which ſets before us the intereſt of two lovers in this rural ſcene. A long deſcription of the "*fontes*," the "*nemus*," and the "*prata*," in the moſt poetical modern manner, would have been inſipid without this ſtroke, which, in a few words, brings home to the heart all the beauties of the place; "hîc ipſo tecum conſumerer ævo." It is a great beauty in Milton's Allegro, that it is all alive, and full of perſons.

Every thing, as I before ſaid, in deſcription, ſhould be as marked and particular as poſſible, in order to imprint on the mind a diſtinct and complete image. A hill, a river, or a lake, riſes up more conſpicuous to the fancy, when ſome particular lake, or river, or hill, is ſpecified, than when the terms are left

* Here cooling fountains roll thro' flow'ry meads,
Here woods, Lycoris, lift their verdant heads,
Here could I wear my careleſs life away,
And in thy arms inſenſibly decay.
Virg. Ecl. X. Warton.

LECT. XL.

general. Moſt of the Antient Writers have been ſenſible of the advantage which this gives to deſcription. Thus, in that beautiful Paſtoral Compoſition, the Song of Solomon, the images are commonly particularized by the objects to which they allude. "It is the "roſe of Sharon; the lily of the vallies; "the flock which feeds on Mount Gilead; "the ſtream which comes from Mount Leba-"non. Come with me, from Lebanon, my "Spouſe; look from the top of Amana, from "the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the "mountains of the Leopards." Ch. iv. 8. So Horace:

Quid dedicatum poſcit Apollinem
Vates? quid orat de patera novum
Fundens liquorem? non opimas
Sardiniæ ſegetes feracis;
Non æſtuoſæ grata Calabriæ
Armenta; non aurum aut ebur Indicum,
Non rura, quæ Liris quietâ
Mordet aqua, taciturnus amnis *.

Lib. I. Ode 31.

Both Homer and Virgil are remarkable for the talent of Poetical Deſcription. In Virgil's Second

* When at Apollo's hallowed ſhrine
The poet hails the power divine,
And here his firſt libation pours,
What is the bleſſing he implores?

He

LECT. XL.

Second Æneid, where he deſcribes the burning and ſacking of Troy, the particulars are ſo well ſelected and repreſented, that the Reader finds himſelf in the midſt of that ſcene of horror. The death of Priam, eſpecially, may be ſingled out as a maſter-piece of deſcription. All the circumſtances of the aged monarch arraying himſelf in armour, when he finds the enemy making themſelves maſters of the city; his meeting with his family, who are taking ſhelter at an altar in the court of the palace, and their placing him in the midſt of them; his indignation when he beholds Pyrrhus ſlaughtering one of his ſons; the feeble dart which he throws; with Pyrrhus's brutal behaviour, and his manner of putting the old man to death, are painted in the moſt affecting manner, and with a maſterly hand. All Homer's battles, and Milton's account, both of Paradiſe, and of the Infernal Regions, furniſh many beautiful inſtances of Poetical Deſcription. Oſſian, too, paints in ſtrong and lively colours, though he employs few circum-

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He nor deſires the ſwelling grain,
That yellows o'er Sardinia's plain,
Nor the fair herds that lowing feed
On warm Calabria's flowery mead;
Nor ivory of ſpotleſs ſhine;
Nor gold forth flaming from the mine;
Nor the rich fields that Liris laves,
And eats away with ſilent waves. FRANCIS.

ſtances;

LECT. XL.

ſtances; and his chief excellency lies in painting to the heart. One of his fulleſt Deſcriptions is, the following of the ruins of Balclutha: "I have ſeen the walls of Balclutha, but they "were deſolate. The fire had reſounded "within the halls; and the voice of the "people is now heard no more. The ſtream "of Clutha was removed from its place, by "the fall of the walls; the thiſtle ſhook there "its lonely head; the moſs whiſtled to the "wind. The fox looked out of the window; "the rank graſs waved round his head. De-"ſolate is the dwelling of Moina. Silence is "in the houſe of her fathers." Shakeſpeare cannot be omitted on this occaſion, as ſingularly eminent for painting with the pencil of nature. Though it be in manners and characters, that his chief excellency lies, yet his ſcenery alſo is often exquiſite, and happily deſcribed by a ſingle ſtroke; as in that fine line of the "Merchant of Venice," which conveys to the fancy as natural and beautiful an image, as can poſſibly be exhibited in ſo few words:

> How ſweet the moon-light ſleeps upon this bank!
> Here will we ſit, &c.

MUCH of the beauty of Deſcriptive Poetry depends on a right choice of Epithets. Many Poets, it muſt be confeſſed, are too careleſs in this particular. Epithets are frequently brought in, merely to complete the verſe, or make

make the rhyme anſwer; and hence they are ſo unmeaning and redundant; expletive words only, which, in place of adding any thing to the deſcription, clog and enervate it. Virgil's "Liquidi fontes," and Horace's "Prata canis "albicant pruinis," muſt, I am afraid, be aſſigned to this claſs: for, to denote by an epithet that water is liquid, or that ſnow is white, is no better than mere tautology. Every epithet ſhould either add a new idea to the word which it qualifies, or at leaſt ſerve to raiſe and heighten its known ſignification. So in Milton,

——Who ſhall tempt with wand'ring feet
The dark, unbottom'd, infinite abyſs,
And through the palpable obſcure, find out
His uncouth way? or ſpread his airy flight,
Upborn with indefatigable wings,
Over the vaſt abrupt? B. II.

The epithets employed here plainly add ſtrength to the deſcription, and aſſiſt the fancy in conceiving it;—the wandering feet—the unbottomed abyſs—the palpable obſcure—the uncouth way—the indefatigable wing—ſerve to render the images more complete and diſtinct. But there are many general epithets, which, though they appear to raiſe the ſignification of the word to which they are joined, yet leave it ſo undetermined, and are now become ſo trite and beaten in poetical language, as to be perfectly inſipid. Of this kind are "bar-

LECT. XL.

"barbarous diſcord—hateful envy—mighty "chiefs—bloody war—gloomy ſhades—direful "ſcenes," and a thouſand more of the ſame kind which we meet with occaſionally in good Poets; but with which, Poets of inferior genius abound every where, as the great props of their affected ſublimity. They give a ſort of ſwell to the language, and raiſe it above the tone of Proſe; but they ſerve not in the leaſt to illuſtrate the object deſcribed; on the contrary, they load the Style with a languid verboſity.

SOMETIMES it is in the power of a Poet of genius, by one well-choſen epithet, to accompliſh a deſcription, and by means of a ſingle word, to paint a whole ſcene to the fancy. We may remark this effect of an epithet in the following fine lines of Milton's Lycidas:

Where were ye, nymphs, when the remorſeleſs deep
Clos'd o'er the head of your lov'd Lycidas?
For neither were ye playing on the ſteep,
Where your old bards, the famous Druids, lie,
Nor on the ſhaggy top of Mona high,
Nor yet where Deva ſpreads her wizard ſtream.

AMONG theſe wild ſcenes, "Deva's wizard "ſtream" is admirably imaged; by this one word, preſenting to the fancy all the romantic ideas, of a river flowing through a deſolate country, with banks haunted by wizards and enchanters,

enchanters. Akin to this is an epithet which Horace gives to the river Hydaſpes. A good man, ſays he, ſtands in need of no arms,

Sive per Syrtes iter æſtuoſas,
Sive facturus per inhoſpitalem
Caucaſum; vel quæ loca fabuloſus
Lambit Hydaſpes*.

This epithet "fabuloſus" one of the commentators on Horace has changed into "ſabu-"loſus" or ſandy; ſubſtituting, by a ſtrange want of taſte, the common and trivial epithet of the ſandy river, in place of that beautiful picture which the Poet gives us, by calling Hydaſpes the Romantic River, or the ſcene of Adventures and Poetic Tales.

VIRGIL has employed an epithet with great beauty and propriety, when accounting for Dædalus not having engraved the fortune of his ſon Icarus:

Bis conatus erat caſus effingere in auro
Bis patriæ cecidere manus†. ÆN. VI.

THESE

* Whether through Lybia's burning ſands
Our journey leads, or Scythia's lands,
Amidſt th' unhoſpitable waſte of ſnows,
Or where the fabulous Hydaſpes flows. FRANCIS.

† Here hapleſs Icarus had found his part,
Had not the father's grief reſtrain'd his art;
He twice aſſayed to caſt his ſon in gold,
Twice from his hand he drop'd the forming mould.
DRYDEN.

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LECT. XL.

THESE inſtances, and obſervations, may give ſome juſt idea of true poetical deſcription. We have reaſon always to diſtruſt an Author's deſcriptive talents, when we find him laborious and turgid, amaſſing common-place epithets and general expreſſions, to work up a high conception of ſome object, of which, after all, we can form but an indiſtinct idea. The beſt deſcribers are ſimple and conciſe. They ſet before us ſuch features of an object, as, on the firſt view, ſtrike and warm the fancy: they give us ideas which a Statuary or a Painter could lay hold of, and work after them; which is one of the ſtrongeſt and moſt deciſive trials of the real merit of Deſcription.

In this tranſlation the thought is juſtly given; but the beauty of the expreſſion "patriæ manus," which in the original conveys the thought with ſo much tenderneſs, is loſt.

LECTURE XLI.

THE POETRY OF THE HEBREWS.

LECT. XLI.

AMONG the various kinds of Poetry, which we are, at preſent, employed in examining, the Antient Hebrew Poetry, or that of the Scriptures, juſtly deſerves a place. Viewing theſe ſacred books in no higher light, than as they preſent to us the moſt antient monuments of Poetry extant, at this day, in the world, they afford a curious object of Criticiſm. They diſplay the taſte of a remote age and country. They exhibit a ſpecies of Compoſition, very different from any other with which we are acquainted, and, at the ſame time, beautiful. Conſidered as Inſpired Writings, they give riſe to diſcuſſions of another kind. But it is our buſineſs, at preſent, to conſider them not in a theological, but in a critical view: and it muſt needs give pleaſure, if we ſhall find the beauty and dignity of the Compoſition, adequate to the weight and importance

LECT. XLI.

ance of the matter. Dr. Lowth's learned Treatiſe, "De Sacra Poëſi Hebræorum," ought to be peruſed by all who deſire to become thoroughly acquainted with this ſubject. It is a work exceedingly valuable, both for the elegance of its Compoſition, and for the juſtneſs of the criticiſm which it contains. In this Lecture, as I cannot illuſtrate the ſubject with more benefit to the Reader, than by following the track of that ingenious Author, I ſhall make much uſe of his obſervations.

I NEED not ſpend many words in ſhowing, that among the books of the Old Teſtament there is ſuch an apparent diverſity in Style, as ſufficiently diſcovers, which of them are to be conſidered as Poetical, and which, as proſe Compoſitions. While the hiſtorical books, and legiſlative writings of Moſes, are evidently proſaic in the compoſition, the Book of Job, the Pſalms of David, the Song of Solomon, the Lamentations of Jeremiah, a great part of the Prophetical Writings, and ſeveral paſſages ſcattered occaſionally through the hiſtorical books, carry the moſt plain and diſtinguiſhing marks of Poetical Writing.

THERE is not the leaſt reaſon for doubting, that originally theſe were written in verſe, or ſome kind of meaſured numbers; though as the antient pronunciation of the Hebrew Lan-

guage is now loſt, we are not able to aſcertain the nature of the Hebrew verſe, or at moſt can aſcertain it but imperfectly. Concerning this point there have been great controverſies among learned men, which it is unneceſſary to our preſent purpoſe to diſcuſs. Taking the Old Teſtament in our own tranſlation, which is extremely literal, we find plain marks of many parts of the original being written in a meaſured Style; and the "diſjecti membra "poëtæ" often ſhow themſelves. Let any perſon read the Hiſtorical Introduction to the book of Job, contained in the firſt and ſecond chapters, and then go on to Job's ſpeech in the beginning of the third chapter, and he cannot avoid being ſenſible, that he paſſes all at once from the region of Proſe, to that of Poetry. Not only the poetical ſentiments, and the figured Style, warn him of the change; but the cadence of the ſentence, and the arrangement of the words, are ſenſibly altered; the change is as great as when he paſſes from reading Cæſar's Commentaries, to read Virgil's Æneid. This is ſufficient to ſhow that the ſacred Scriptures contain, what muſt be called Poetry in the ſtricteſt ſenſe of that word; and I ſhall afterwards ſhow, that they contain inſtances of moſt of the different forms of Poetical Writing. It may be proper to remark, in paſſing, that hence ariſes a moſt invincible argument in honour of Poetry. No

LECT. XLI.

LECT. XLI.

perſon can imagine that to be a frivolous and contemptible art, which has been employed by Writers under divine inſpiration, and has been choſen as a proper channel for conveying to the world the knowledge of divine truth.

FROM the earlieſt times, Muſic and Poetry were cultivated among the Hebrews. In the days of the Judges, mention is made of the Schools or Colleges of the Prophets; where one part of the employment of the perſons trained in ſuch ſchools was, to ſing the praiſes of God, accompanied with various inſtruments. In the firſt Book of Samuel (chap. x. 7.), we find on a public occaſion, a company of theſe Prophets coming down from the hill where their ſchool was, "propheſying," it is ſaid, "with the pſaltery, tabret, and harp before "them." But in the days of King David, Muſic and Poetry were carried to their greateſt height. For the ſervice of the Tabernacle, he appointed four thouſand Levites, divided into twenty-four courſes, and marſhalled under ſeveral leaders, whoſe ſole buſineſs it was to ſing Hymns, and to perform the inſtrumental muſic in the public worſhip. Aſaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, were the chief directors of the muſic; and, from the titles of ſome Pſalms, it would appear that they were alſo eminent compoſers of Hymns or Sacred Poems. In

chapter

LECT. XLI.

chapter xxv. of the firſt Book of Chronicles, an account is given of David's inſtitutions, relating to the ſacred Muſic and Poetry; which were certainly more coſtly, more ſplendid and magnificent, than ever obtained in the public ſervice of any other nation.

THE general conſtruction of the Hebrew Poetry is of a ſingular nature, and peculiar to itſelf. It conſiſts in dividing every period into correſpondent, for the moſt part into equal members, which anſwer to one another, both in ſenſe and ſound. In the firſt member of the period a ſentiment is expreſſed; and in the ſecond member, the ſame ſentiment is amplified, or is repeated in different terms, or ſometimes contraſted with its oppoſite; but in ſuch a manner that the ſame ſtructure, and nearly the ſame number of words is preſerved. This is the general ſtrain of all the Hebrew Poetry. Inſtances of it occur every where on opening the Old Teſtament. Thus, in Pſalm xcvi. "Sing unto the Lord a new ſong—Sing unto "the Lord all the earth. Sing unto the Lord, "and bleſs his name—ſhew forth his ſalvation "from day to day. Declare his glory among "the heathen—his wonders among all the peo-"ple. For the Lord is great, and greatly to be "praiſed—He is to be feared above all the "gods. Honour and majeſty are before him—"Strength and beauty are in his ſanctuary."

LECT. XLI.

It is owing, in a great meaſure, to this form of Compoſition, that our verſion, though in Proſe, retains ſo much of a poetical caſt. For the verſion being ſtrictly word for word after the original, the form and order of the original ſentence are preſerved; which, by this artificial ſtructure, this regular alternation and correſpondence of parts, makes the ear ſenſible of a departure from the common Style and Tone of Proſe.

THE origin of this form of Poetical Compoſition among the Hebrews, is clearly to be deduced from the manner in which their Sacred Hymns were wont to be ſung. They were accompanied with muſic, and they were performed by choirs or bands of ſingers and muſicians, who anſwered alternately to each other. When, for inſtance, one band began the Hymn thus: "The Lord reigneth, let the "earth rejoice;" the chorus, or ſemichorus, took up the correſponding verſicle: "Let the "multitudes of the iſles be glad thereof."—— "Clouds and darkneſs are round about him," ſung the one; the other replied, "Judgment "and righteouſneſs are the habitation of his "throne." And in this manner their Poetry, when ſet to muſic, naturally divided itſelf into a ſucceſſion of ſtrophes and antiſtrophes correſpondent to each other; whence, it is probable, the Antiphon, or Reſponſory, in the public religious

religious ſervice of ſo many Chriſtian churches, derived its origin.

We are expreſsly told, in the Book of Ezra, that the Levites ſung in this manner; "Alternatim," or by courſe (Ezra, iii. 11.); and ſome of David's Pſalms bear plain marks of their being compoſed in order to be thus performed. The 24th Pſalm, in particular, which is thought to have been compoſed on the great and ſolemn occaſion of the Ark of the Covenant being brought back to Mount Zion, muſt have had a noble effect when performed after this manner, as Dr. Lowth has illuſtrated it. The whole people are ſuppoſed to be attending the proceſſion. The Levites and Singers, divided into their ſeveral courſes, and accompanied with all their muſical inſtruments, lead the way. After the Introduction to the Pſalm, in the two firſt verſes, when the proceſſion begins to aſcend the ſacred Mount, the queſtion is put, as by a ſemichorus, "Who ſhall aſcend "unto the hill of the Lord, and who ſhall "ſtand in his holy place?" The reſponſe is made by the full chorus with the greateſt dignity: "He that hath clean hands and a "pure heart; who hath not lifted up his ſoul "to vanity, nor ſworn deceitfully." As the proceſſion approaches to the doors of the Tabernacle, the chorus, with all their inſtruments, join in this exclamation: "Lift up

SECT. XLI.

" your heads, ye gates, and be ye lifted up, ye " everlaſting doors, and the King of Glory " ſhall come in." Here the ſemichorus plainly break in, as with a lower voice, " Who is " this King of Glory?" and at the moment when the Ark is introduced into the Tabernacle, the reſponſe is made by the burſt of the whole chorus: " The Lord, ſtrong and " mighty; the Lord, mighty in battle." I take notice of this inſtance the rather, as it ſerves to ſhow how much of the grace and magnificence of the Sacred Poems, as indeed of all Poems, depends upon our knowing the particular occaſions for which they were compoſed, and the particular circumſtances to which they were adapted; and how much of this beauty muſt now be loſt to us, through our imperfect acquaintance with many particulars of the Hebrew hiſtory, and Hebrew rites.

The method of Compoſition which has been explained, by correſpondent verſicles, being univerſally introduced into the Hymns or muſical Poetry of the Jews, eaſily ſpread itſelf through their other Poetical Writings, which were not deſigned to be ſung in alternate portions, and which therefore did not ſo much require this mode of Compoſition. But the mode became familiar to their ears, and carried with it a certain ſolemn majeſty of Style, particularly

LECT. XLI.

ticularly ſuited to ſacred ſubjects. Hence, throughout the Prophetical Writings, we find it prevailing as much as in the Pſalms of David; as, for inſtance, in the Prophet Iſaiah (chap. lx. 1.) "Ariſe, ſhine, for thy light is "come, and the glory of the Lord is riſen "upon thee: For, lo! darkneſs ſhall cover the "earth, and groſs darkneſs the people. But "the Lord ſhall riſe upon thee, and his "glory ſhall be ſeen upon thee, and the Gen-"tiles ſhall come to thy light, and kings to "the brightneſs of thy riſing." This form of writing is one of the great characteriſtics of the antient Hebrew Poetry; very different from, and even oppoſite to, the Style of the Greek and Roman Poets.

INDEPENDENTLY of this peculiar mode of conſtruction, the ſacred Poetry is diſtinguiſhed by the higheſt beauties of ſtrong, conciſe, bold, and figurative expreſſion.

CONCISENESS and ſtrength, are two of its moſt remarkable characters. One might indeed at firſt imagine, that the practice of the Hebrew Poets, of always amplifying the ſame thought, by repetition or contraſt, might tend to enfeeble their Style. But they conduct themſelves ſo as not to produce this effect. Their ſentences are always ſhort. Few ſuperfluous words are uſed. The ſame thought is

LECT. XLI.

never dwelt upon long. To their conciſeneſs and ſobriety of expreſſion, their Poetry is indebted for much of its ſublimity; and all Writers who attempt the Sublime, might profit much, by imitating, in this reſpect, the Style of the Old Teſtament. For, as I have formerly had occaſion to ſhow, nothing is ſo great an enemy to the Sublime, as prolixity or diffuſeneſs. The mind is never ſo much affected by any great idea that is preſented to it, as when it is ſtruck all at once; by attempting to prolong the impreſſion, we at the ſame time weaken it. Moſt of the antient original Poets of all nations, are ſimple and conciſe. The ſuperfluities and excreſcences of Style, were the reſult of imitation in after-times; when Compoſition paſſed into inferior hands, and flowed from art and ſtudy, more than from native genius.

No Writings whatever abound ſo much with the moſt bold and animated figures, as the Sacred Books. It is proper to dwell a little upon this article; as, through our early familiarity with theſe books, a familiarity too often with the ſound of the words, rather than with their ſenſe and meaning, beauties of Style eſcape us in the Scripture, which, in any other book, would draw particular attention. Metaphors, Compariſons, Allegories, and Perſonifications, are there particularly frequent. In order

LECT. XLI.

order to do juſtice to theſe, it is neceſſary that we tranſport ourſelves as much as we can into the land of Judæa; and place before our eyes that ſcenery, and thoſe objects, with which the Hebrew Writers were converſant. Some attention of this kind is requiſite, in order to reliſh the writings of any Poet of a foreign country, and a different age. For the imagery of every good Poet is copied from nature, and real life; if it were not ſo, it could not be lively; and therefore, in order to enter into the propriety of his images, we muſt endeavour to place ourſelves in his ſituation. Now we ſhall find, that the Metaphors and Compariſons of the Hebrew Poets, preſent to us a very beautiful view of the natural objects of their own country, and of the arts and employments of their common life.

NATURAL objects are in ſome meaſure common to them with Poets of all ages and countries. Light and darkneſs, trees and flowers, the foreſt and the cultivated field, ſuggeſt to them many beautiful figures. But, in order to reliſh their figures of this kind, we muſt take notice, that ſeveral of them ariſe from the particular circumſtances of the land of Judæa. During the ſummer months, little or no rain falls throughout all that region. While the heats continued, the country was intolerably parched; want of water was a great diſtreſs; and

LECT. XLI.

and a plentiful ſhower falling, or a rivulet breaking forth, altered the whole face of nature, and introduced much higher ideas of refreſhment and pleaſure, than the like cauſes can ſuggeſt to us. Hence, to repreſent diſtreſs, ſuch frequent alluſions amongſt them, "to a "dry and thirſty land where no water is;" and hence, to deſcribe a change from diſtreſs to proſperity, their metaphors are founded on the falling of ſhowers, and the burſting out of ſprings in the deſart. Thus in Iſaiah, "The "wilderneſs and the ſolitary place ſhall be "glad, and the deſart ſhall rejoice and bloſſom "as the roſe. For in the wilderneſs ſhall "waters break out, and ſtreams in the deſart; "and the parched ground ſhall become a "pool; and the thirſty land, ſprings of water; "in the habitation of dragons there ſhall be "graſs, with ruſhes and reeds." Chap. xxxv. 1. 6, 7. Images of this nature are very familiar to Iſaiah, and occur in many parts of his Book.

AGAIN, as Judæa was a hilly country, it was, during the rainy months, expoſed to frequent inundations by the ruſhing of torrents, which came down ſuddenly from the mountains, and carried every thing before them; and Jordan, their only great river, annually overflowed its banks. Hence the frequent alluſions to "the "noiſe, and to the ruſhings of many waters;"

and

and hence great calamities ſo often compared to the overflowing torrent, which, in ſuch a country, muſt have been images particularly ſtriking: "Deep calleth unto deep at the "noiſe of thy water-ſpouts; all thy waves and "thy billows are gone over me." Pſalm xlii. 7.

THE two moſt remarkable mountains of the country, were Lebanon and Carmel: the former noted for its height, and the woods of lofty cedars that covered it; the latter, for its beauty and fertility, the richneſs of its vines and olives. Hence, with the greateſt propriety, Lebanon, is employed as an image of whatever is great, ſtrong, or magnificent; Carmel, of what is ſmiling and beautiful. "The glory of Lebanon," ſays Iſaiah, "ſhall "be given to it, and the excellency of Car-"mel." (xxxv. 2.) Lebanon is often put metaphorically for the whole ſtate or people of Iſrael, for the temple, for the king of Aſſyria; Carmel, for the bleſſings of peace and proſperity. "His countenance is as Lebanon," ſays Solomon, ſpeaking of the dignity of a man's appearance; but when he deſcribes female beauty, "Thine head is like mount "Carmel." Song, v. 15. and vii. 5.

IT is farther to be remarked under this head, that in the images of the awful and terrible kind, with which the Sacred Poets abound, they

LECT. XLI.

they plainly draw their deſcriptions from that violence of the elements, and thoſe concuſſions of nature, with which their climate rendered them acquainted. Earthquakes were not unfrequent; and the tempeſts of hail, thunder, and lightning, in Judæa and Arabia, accompanied with whirlwinds and darkneſs, far exceed any thing of that ſort which happens in more temperate regions. Iſaiah deſcribes, with great majeſty, the earth "reeling to and "fro like a drunkard, and removed like a "cottage." (xxiv. 20.) And in thoſe circumſtances of terror, with which an appearance of the Almighty is deſcribed in the 18th Pſalm, when his "pavilion round about him was "darkneſs; when hailſtones and coals of fire "were his voice; and when, at his rebuke, the "channels of the waters are ſaid to be ſeen, "and the foundations of the hills diſcovered;" though there may be ſome reference, as Dr. Lowth thinks, to the hiſtory of God's deſcent upon Mount Sinai, yet it ſeems more probable, that the figures were taken directly from thoſe commotions of nature with which the Author was acquainted, and which ſuggeſted ſtronger and nobler images than what now occur to us.

Besides the natural objects of their own country, we find the rites of their religion, and the arts and employments of their common life, frequently employed as grounds of imagery

among the Hebrews. They were a people chiefly occupied with agriculture and paſturage. Theſe were arts held in high honour among them; not diſdained by their patriarchs, kings, and prophets. Little addicted to commerce; ſeparated from the reſt of the world by their laws and their religion; they were, during the better days of their ſtate, ſtrangers in a great meaſure to the refinements of luxury. Hence flowed, of courſe, the many alluſions to paſtoral life, to the "green paſtures "and the ſtill waters," and to the care and watchfulneſs of a ſhepherd over his flock, which carry to this day ſo much beauty and tenderneſs in them, in the 23d Pſalm, and in many other paſſages of the Poetical Writings of Scripture. Hence, all the images founded upon rural employments, upon the wine-preſs, the threſhing-floor, the ſtubble and the chaff. To diſreliſh all ſuch images, is the effect of falſe delicacy. Homer is at leaſt as frequent, and much more minute and particular, in his ſimilies, founded on what we now call low life; but, in his management of them, far inferior to the Sacred Writers, who generally mix with their comparriſons of this kind ſomewhat of dignity and grandeur, to ennoble them. What inexpreſſible grandeur does the following rural image in Iſaiah, for inſtance, receive from the intervention of the Deity: "The nations ſhall "ruſh like the ruſhings of many waters; but "God

LECT. XLI.

LECT. XLI.

"God ſhall rebuke them, and they ſhall fly far "off; and they ſhall be chaſed as the chaff of "the mountain before the wind, and like the "down of the thiſtle before the whirlwind."

FIGURATIVE alluſions too, we frequently find, to the rites and ceremonies of their religion; to the legal diſtinctions of things clean and unclean; to the mode of their Temple Service; to the dreſs of their Prieſts; and to the moſt noted incidents recorded in their Sacred Hiſtory; as to the deſtruction of Sodom, the deſcent of God upon Mount Sinai, and the miraculous paſſage of the Iſraelites through the Red Sea. The religion of the Hebrews included the whole of their laws, and civil conſtitution. It was full of ſplendid external rites, that occupied their ſenſes; it was connected with every part of their national hiſtory and eſtabliſhment; and hence, all ideas founded on religion, poſſeſſed in this nation a dignity and importance peculiar to themſelves, and were uncommonly fitted to impreſs the imagination.

FROM all this it reſults, that the imagery of the Sacred Poets is, in a high degree, expreſſive and natural; it is copied directly from real objects, that were before their eyes; it has this advantage, of being more complete within itſelf, more entirely founded on national ideas and

and manners, than that of moſt other Poets. In reading their works, we find ourſelves continually in the land of Judæa. The palm-trees, and the cedars of Lebanon, are ever riſing in our view. The face of their territory, the circumſtances of their climate, the manners of the people, and the auguſt ceremonies of their religion, conſtantly paſs under different forms before us. LECT. XLI.

THE compariſons employed by the Sacred Poets are generally ſhort, touching on one point only of reſemblance, rather than branching out into little Epiſodes. In this reſpect, they have perhaps an advantage over the Greek and Roman Authors; whoſe compariſons, by the length to which they are extended, ſometimes interrupt the narration too much, and carry too viſible marks of ſtudy and labour. Whereas, in the Hebrew Poets, they appear more like the glowings of a lively fancy, juſt glancing aſide to ſome reſembling object, and preſently returning to its track. Such is the following fine compariſon, introduced to deſcribe the happy influence of good government upon a people, in what are called the laſt words of David, recorded in the 2d Book of Samuel (xxiii. 3.): "He that ruleth "over men muſt be juſt, ruling in the fear of "God; and he ſhall be as the light of the "morning, when the Sun riſeth; even a

LECT. XLI.

" morning without clouds; as the tender " graſs ſpringing out of the earth, by clear " ſhining after rain." This is one of the moſt regular and formal compariſons in the Sacred Books.

ALLEGORY, likewiſe, is a figure frequently found in them. When formerly treating of this figure, I gave, for an inſtance of it, that remarkably fine and well-ſupported Allegory, which occurs in the 80th Pſalm, wherein the People of Iſrael are compared to a Vine. Of Parables, which form a ſpecies of Allegory, the Prophetical Writings are full: and if to us they ſometimes appear obſcure, we muſt remember, that in thoſe early times, it was univerſally the mode throughout all the eaſtern nations, to convey ſacred truths under myſterious figures and repreſentations.

BUT the Poetical Figure, which, beyond all others, elevates the Style of Scripture, and gives it a peculiar boldneſs and ſublimity, is Proſopopœia or Perſonification. No Perſonifications employed by any Poets, are ſo magnificent and ſtriking as thoſe of the Inſpired Writers. On great occaſions, they animate very part of nature; eſpecially, when any appearance or operation of the Almighty is concerned. " Before him went the peſti- " lence—the waters ſaw thee, O God, and " were

" were afraid—the mountains ſaw thee, and " they trembled.—The overflowing of the " water paſſed by;—the deep uttered his " voice, and lifted up his hands on high." When enquiry is made about the place of wiſdom, Job introduces the " Deep, ſaying, " it is not in me; and the ſea ſaith, it is not " in me. Deſtruction and death ſay, we " have heard the fame thereof with our ears." That noted ſublime paſſage in the Book of Iſaiah, which deſcribes the fall of the King of Aſſyria, is full of perſonified objects; the fir trees and cedars of Lebanon breaking forth into exultation on the fall of the tyrant; Hell from beneath, ſtirring up all the dead to meet him at his coming; and the dead Kings introduced as ſpeaking, and joining in the triumph. In the ſame ſtrain, are theſe many lively and paſſionate apoſtrophes to cities and countries, to perſons and things, with which the Prophetical Writings every where abound. " O thou ſword of the Lord! how long will it " be ere thou be quiet? put thyſelf up into " the ſcabbard, reſt and be ſtill. How can it " be quiet," (as the reply is inſtantly made) " ſeeing the Lord hath given it a charge " againſt Aſkelon, and the ſea-ſhore? there " hath he appointed it." Jerem. xlvii. 6.

In general, for it would carry us too far to enlarge upon all the inſtances, the Style of the

LECT. XLI.

Poetical Books of the Old Teſtament is, beyond the Style of all other Poetical Works, fervid, bold, and animated. It is extremely different from that regular correct expreſſion, to which our ears are accuſtomed in Modern Poetry. It is the burſt of inſpiration. The ſcenes are not coolly deſcribed, but repreſented as paſſing before our eyes. Every object, and every perſon, is addreſſed and ſpoken to, as if preſent. The tranſition is often abrupt; the connection often obſcure; the perſons are often changed; figures crowded, and heaped upon one another. Bold ſublimity, not correct elegance, is its character. We ſee the ſpirit of the Writer raiſed beyond himſelf, and labouring to find vent for ideas too mighty for his utterance.

After theſe remarks on the Poetry of the Scripture in general, I ſhall conclude this Diſſertation, with a ſhort account of the different kinds of Poetical Compoſition in the Sacred Books; and of the diſtinguiſhing characters of ſome of the chief Writers.

The ſeveral kinds of Poetical Compoſition which we find in Scripture, are chiefly the Didactic, Elegiac, Paſtoral, and Lyric. Of the Didactic ſpecies of Poetry, the Book of Proverbs is the principal inſtance. The nine firſt Chapters of that Book are highly poetical, adorned

adorned with many diſtinguiſhed graces, and figures of expreſſion. At the 10th Chapter, the Style is ſenſibly altered, and deſcends into a lower ſtrain, which is continued to the end; retaining however that ſententious, pointed manner, and that artful conſtruction of period, which diſtinguiſh all the Hebrew Poetry. The Book of Eccleſiaſtes comes likewiſe under this head; and ſome of the Pſalms, as the 119th in particular.

Of Elegiac Poetry, many very beautiful ſpecimens occur in Scripture; ſuch as the Lamentation of David over his friend Jonathan; ſeveral paſſages in the Prophetical Books; and ſeveral of David's Pſalms, compoſed on occaſions of diſtreſs and mourning. The 42d Pſalm, in particular, is, in the higheſt degree, tender and plaintive. But the moſt regular and perfect Elegiac Compoſition in the Scripture, perhaps in the whole world, is the Book, entitled the Lamentations of Jeremiah. As the Prophet mourns in that book over the deſtruction of the Temple, and the Holy City, and the overthrow of the whole State, he aſſembles all the affecting images which a ſubject ſo melancholy could ſuggeſt. The Compoſition is uncommonly artificial. By turns, the Prophet, and the city Jeruſalem, are introduced, as pouring forth their ſorrows; and in the end, a chorus of the people ſend up

LECT. XLI.

the moſt earneſt and plaintive ſupplications to God. The lines of the original too, as may, in part, appear from our tranſlation, are longer than is uſual in the other kinds of Hebrew Poetry; and the melody is rendered thereby more flowing, and better adapted to the querimonious ſtrain of Elegy.

The Song of Solomon affords us a high exemplification of Paſtoral Poetry. Conſidered with reſpect to its ſpiritual meaning, it is undoubtedly a myſtical Allegory; in its form, it is a Dramatic Paſtoral, or a perpetual Dialogue between perſonages in the character of Shepherds; and, ſuitably to that form, it is full of rural and paſtoral images, from beginning to end.

Of Lyric Poetry, or that which is intended to be accompanied with Muſic, the Old Teſtament is full. Beſides a great number of Hymns and Songs, which we find ſcattered in the Hiſtorical and Prophetical Books, ſuch as the Song of Moſes, the Song of Deborah, and many others of like nature, the whole Book of Pſalms is to be conſidered as a collection of Sacred Odes. In theſe, we find the Ode exhibited in all the varieties of its form, and ſupported with the higheſt ſpirit of Lyric Poetry; ſometimes ſprightly, cheerful, and triumphant; ſometimes ſolemn and magnificent; ſometimes tender

LECT. XLI.

tender and ſoft. From theſe inſtances, it clearly appears, that there are contained in the Holy Scriptures, full exemplifications of ſeveral of the chief kinds of Poetical Writing.

Among the different Compoſers of the Sacred Books, there is an evident diverſity of ſtyle and manner; and to trace their different characters in this view, will contribute not a little towards our reading their Writings with greater advantage. The moſt eminent of the Sacred Poets are, the Author of the Book of Job, David, and Iſaiah. As the Compoſitions of David are of the Lyric kind, there is a greater variety of ſtyle and manner in his works, than in thoſe of the other two. The manner in which, conſidered merely as a Poet, David chiefly excels, is the pleaſing, the ſoft, and the tender. In his Pſalms, there are many lofty and ſublime paſſages; but, in ſtrength of deſcription, he yields to Job; in ſublimity, he yields to Iſaiah. It is a ſort of temperate grandeur, for which David is chiefly diſtinguiſhed; and to this he always ſoon returns, when, upon ſome occaſions, he riſes above it. The Pſalms in which he touches us moſt, are thoſe in which he deſcribes the happineſs of the righteous, or the goodneſs of God; expreſſes the tender breathings of a devout mind, or ſends up moving and affec-

LECT. XLI.

tionate ſupplications to Heaven. Iſaiah is, without exception, the moſt ſublime of all Poets. This is abundantly viſible in our Tranſlation; and, what is a material circumſtance, none of the Books of Scripture appear to have been more happily tranſlated than the Writings of this Prophet. Majeſty is his reigning character; a majeſty more commanding, and more uniformly ſupported, than is to be found among the reſt of the Old Teſtament Poets. He poſſeſſes, indeed, a dignity and grandeur, both in his conceptions and expreſſions, which is altogether unparalleled, and peculiar to himſelf. There is more clearneſs and order too, and a more viſible diſtribution of parts, in his Book, than in any other of the Prophetical Writings.

When we compare him with the reſt of the Poetical Prophets, we immediately ſee in Jeremiah, a very different genius. Iſaiah employs himſelf generally on magnificent ſubjects. Jeremiah ſeldom diſcovers any diſpoſition to be ſublime, and inclines always to the tender and elegiac. Ezechiel, in poetical grace and elegance, is much inferior to them both; but he is diſtinguiſhed by a character of uncommon force and ardour. To uſe the elegant expreſſions of Biſhop Lowth, with regard to this Prophet: "Eſt atrox, vehemens, "tragicus; in ſenſibus, fervidus, acerbus, in-

LECT. XLI.

" dignabundus; in imaginibus fecundus, tru-
" culentus, et nonnunquam penè deformis;
" in dictione grandiloquus, gravis, auſterus, et
" interdum incultus; frequens in repetitioni-
" bus, non decoris aut gratiæ cauſa, ſed ex
" indignatione et violentia. Quicquid ſuſce-
" perit tractandum id ſedulò perſequitur; in
" eo unicè hæret defixus; a propoſito raro
" deflectens. In cæteris, a pleriſque vatibus
" fortaſſe ſuperatus; ſed in eo genere, ad quod
" videtur a natura unice comparatus, nimi-
" rum, vi, pondere, impetu, granditate, nemo
" unquam eum ſuperavit." The ſame learned Writer compares Iſaiah to Homer, Jeremiah to Simonides, and Ezechiel to Æſchylus. Moſt of the Book of Iſaiah is ſtrictly Poetical; of Jeremiah and Ezechiel, not above one half can be held to belong to Poetry. Among the Minor Prophets, Hoſea, Joel, Micah, Habakkuk, and eſpecially Nahum, are diſtinguiſhed for poetical ſpirit. In the Prophecies of Daniel and Jonah, there is no Poetry.

It only now remains to ſpeak of the Book of Job, with which I ſhall conclude. It is known to be extremely antient; generally reputed the moſt antient of all the Poetical Books; the Author uncertain. It is remarkable, that this book has no connection with the affairs, or manners of the Jews, or Hebrews. The ſcene is laid in the land of Uz, or Idumæa, which is

LECT. XLI.

a part of Arabia; and the imagery employed is generally of a different kind, from what I before ſhowed to be peculiar to the Hebrew Poets. We meet with no alluſions to the great events of Sacred Hiſtory, to the religious rites of the Jews, to Lebanon or to Carmel, or any of the peculiarities of the climate of Judæa. We find few compariſons founded on rivers or torrents; theſe were not familiar objects in Arabia. But the longeſt compariſon that occurs in the Book, is to an object frequent and well known in that region, a brook that fails in the ſeaſon of heat, and diſappoints the expectation of the traveller.

THE Poetry, however, of the Book of Job, is not only equal to that of any other of the Sacred Writings, but is ſuperior to them all, except thoſe of Iſaiah alone. As Iſaiah is the moſt ſublime, David the moſt pleaſing and tender, ſo Job is the moſt deſcriptive, of all the Inſpired Poets. A peculiar glow of fancy, and ſtrength of deſcription, characteriſe the Author. No Writer whatever abounds ſo much in Metaphors. He may be ſaid, not to deſcribe, but to render viſible, whatever he treats of. A variety of inſtances might be given. Let us remark only thoſe ſtrong and lively colours, with which, in the following paſſages, taken from the 18th and 20th Chapters of his Book, he paints the condition of the wicked;

wicked; obſerve how rapidly his figures riſe before us; and what a deep impreſſion, at the ſame time, they leave on the imagination. "Knoweſt thou not this of old, ſince man was "placed upon the earth, that the triumphing "of the wicked is ſhort, and the joy of the "hypocrite, but for a moment? Though his "excellency mount up to the heavens, and his "head reach the clouds, yet he ſhall periſh for "ever. He ſhall fly away as a dream, and "ſhall not be found; yea, he ſhall be chaſed "away, as a viſion of the night. The eye alſo "which ſaw him, ſhall ſee him no more; they "which have ſeen him, ſhall ſay, where is he? "He ſhall ſuck the poiſon of aſps; the viper's "tongue ſhall ſlay him. In the fullneſs of "his ſufficiency, he ſhall be in ſtraits; every "hand ſhall come upon him. He ſhall flee "from the iron weapon, and the bow of ſteel "ſhall ſtrike him through. All darkneſs ſhall "be hid in his ſecret places. A fire not "blown ſhall conſume him. The Heaven ſhall "reveal his iniquity, and the earth ſhall riſe "up againſt him. The increaſe of his houſe "ſhall depart. His goods ſhall flow away in "the day of wrath. The light of the wicked "ſhall be put out; the light ſhall be dark in "his tabernacle. The ſteps of his ſtrength "ſhall be ſtraitned, and his own counſel ſhall "caſt him down. For he is caſt into a net, by "his own feet. He walketh upon a ſnare.

LECT. XLI.

"Terrors ſhall make him afraid on every ſide;
"and the robber ſhall prevail againſt him.
"Brimſtone ſhall be ſcattered upon his habi-
"tation. His remembrance ſhall periſh from
"the earth, and he ſhall have no name in the
"ſtreet. He ſhall be driven from light into
"darkneſs. They that come after him ſhall
"be aſtoniſhed at his day. He ſhall drink of
"the wrath of the Almighty."

LECTURE XLII.

EPIC POETRY.

LECT. XLII.

IT now remains to treat of the two higheſt kinds of Poetical Writing, the Epic and the Dramatic. I begin with the Epic. This Lecture ſhall be employed upon the general principles of that Species of Compoſition: after which, I ſhall take a view of the character and genius of the moſt celebrated Epic Poets.

THE Epic Poem is univerſally allowed to be, of all poetical works, the moſt dignified, and at the ſame time, the moſt difficult in execution. To contrive a ſtory which ſhall pleaſe and intereſt all Readers, by being at once entertaining, important, and inſtructive; to fill it with ſuitable incidents; to enliven it with a variety of characters, and of deſcriptions; and, throughout a long work, to maintain that propriety of ſentiment, and that elevation of Style, which the Epic Character requires, is unqueſtionably the higheſt effort of

Poetical

LECT. XLII.

Poetical Genius. Hence ſo very few have ſucceeded in the attempt, that ſtrict Critics will hardly allow any other Poems to bear the name of Epic, except the Iliad, and the Æneid.

THERE is no ſubject, it muſt be confeſſed, on which Critics have diſplayed more pedantry, than on this. By tedious Diſquiſitions, founded on a ſervile ſubmiſſion to authority, they have given ſuch an air of myſtery to a plain ſubject, as to render it difficult for an ordinary Reader to conceive, what an Epic Poem is. By Boſſu's definition, it is a Diſcourſe invented by art, purely to form the manners of men, by means of inſtructions diſguiſed under the allegory of ſome important action, which is related in Verſe. This definition would ſuit ſeveral of Æſop's Fables, if they were ſomewhat extended, and put into Verſe: and, accordingly, to illuſtrate his definition, the Critic draws a parallel, in form, between the conſtruction of one of Æſop's Fables, and the plan of Homer's Iliad. The firſt thing, ſays he, which either a Writer of Fables, or of Heroic Poems, does, is to chooſe ſome maxim or point of morality; to inculcate which, is to be the deſign of his work. Next, he invents a general ſtory, or a ſeries of facts, without any names, ſuch as he judges will be moſt proper for illuſtrating his intended Moral.

Laſtly,

LECT. XLII.

Laſtly, he particulariſes his ſtory; that is, if he be a Fabuliſt, he introduces his dog, his ſheep, and his wolf; or if he be an Epic Poet, he looks out in Antient Hiſtory for ſome proper names of heroes to give to his actors; and then his plan is completed.

THIS is one of the moſt frigid, and abſurd ideas, that ever entered into the mind of a Critic. Homer, he ſays, ſaw the Grecians divided into a great number of independent States; but very often obliged to unite into one body againſt their common enemies. The moſt uſeful inſtruction which he could give them in this ſituation, was, that a miſunderſtanding between princes is the ruin of the common cauſe. In order to enforce this inſtruction, he contrived, in his own mind, ſuch a general ſtory as this. Several princes join in a confederacy againſt their enemy. The prince, who was choſen as the leader of the reſt, affronts one of the moſt valiant of the confederates, who thereupon withdraws himſelf, and refuſes to take part in the common enterprize. Great misfortunes are the conſequence of this diviſion; till, at length, both parties having ſuffered by the quarrel, the offended prince forgets his diſpleaſure, and is reconciled to the leader; and union being once reſtored, there enſues complete victory over their enemies. Upon this general plan of his Fable, adds Boſſu, it was of no great conſequence,

whether,

LECT. XLII.

whether, in filling it up, Homer had employed the names of beaſts, like Æſop, or of men. He would have been equally inſtructive either way. But as he rather fancied to write of heroes, he pitched upon the war of Troy for the ſcene of his Fable; he feigned ſuch an action to happen there; he gave the name of Agamemnon, to the common leader; that of Achilles, to the offended prince; and ſo the Iliad aroſe.

He that can believe Homer to have proceeded in this manner, may believe any thing. One may pronounce, with great certainty, that an Author who ſhould compoſe according to ſuch a plan; who ſhould arrange all the ſubject, in his own mind, with a view to the moral, before he had ever thought of the perſonages who were to be the Actors, might write, perhaps, uſeful Fables for children; but as to an Epic Poem, if he adventured to think of one, it would be ſuch as would find few Readers. No perſon of any taſte can entertain a doubt, that the firſt objects which ſtrike an Epic Poet are, the Hero whom he is to celebrate, and the Action, or Story, which is to be the groundwork of his Poem. He does not ſit down, like a Philoſopher, to form the plan of a Treatiſe of Morality. His genius is fired by ſome great enterprize, which, to him, appears noble and intereſting; and which, therefore, he

LECT. XLII.

he pitches upon as worthy of being celebrated in the higheſt ſtrain of Poetry. There is no ſubject of this kind, but will always afford ſome general moral inſtruction, ariſing from it naturally. The inſtruction which Boſſu points out, is certainly ſuggeſted by the Iliad; and there is another which ariſes as naturally, and may juſt as well be aſſigned for the moral of that Poem; namely, that Providence avenges thoſe who have ſuffered injuſtice; but that when they allow their reſentment to carry them too far, it brings misfortunes on themſelves. The ſubject of the Poem, is the wrath of Achilles, cauſed by the injuſtice of Agamemnon. Jupiter avenges Achilles, by giving ſucceſs to the Trojans againſt Agamemnon; but by continuing obſtinate in his reſentment, Achilles loſes his beloved friend Patroclus.

The plain account of the nature of an Epic Poem is, the recital of ſome illuſtrious enterpriſe in a Poetical Form. This is as exact a definition, as there is any occaſion for on this ſubject. It comprehends ſeveral other Poems beſides the Iliad of Homer, the Æneid of Virgil, and the Jeruſalem of Taſſo; which are, perhaps, the three moſt regular and complete Epic Works that ever were compoſed. But to exclude all Poems from the Epic Claſs, which are not formed exactly upon the ſame model as theſe, is the pedantry of Criticiſm.

We

LECT. XLII.

We can give exact definitions, and deſcriptions of minerals, plants, and animals; and can arrange them with preciſion, under the different claſſes to which they belong, becauſe Nature affords a viſible unvarying ſtandard, to which we refer them. But with regard to works of taſte and imagination, where Nature has fixed no ſtandard, but leaves ſcope for beauties of many different kinds, it is abſurd to attempt defining, and limiting them, with the ſame preciſion. Criticiſm, when employed in ſuch attempts, degenerates into trifling queſtions about words and names only. I therefore have no ſcruple to claſs ſuch Poems, as Milton's Paradiſe Loſt, Lucan's Pharſalia, Statius's Thebaid, Oſſian's Fingal and Temora, Camoen's Luſiad, Voltaire's Henriade, Cambray's Telemachus, Glover's Leonidas, Wilkie's Epigoniad, under the ſame ſpecies of Compoſition with the Iliad and the Æneid; though ſome of them approach much nearer than others to the perfection of theſe celebrated Works. They are, undoubtedly, all Epic; that is, poetical recitals of great adventures; which is all that is meant by this denomination of Poetry.

Though I cannot, by any means, allow, that it is the eſſence of an Epic Poem to be wholly an Allegory, or a Fable contrived to illuſtrate ſome moral truth, yet it is certain, that

LECT. XLII.

that no Poetry is of a more moral nature than this. Its effect in promoting virtue, is not to be measured by any one maxim, or instruction, which results from the whole story, like the moral of one of Æsop's Fables. This is a poor and trivial view of the advantage to be derived from perusing a long Epic Work, that, at the end, we shall be able to gather from it some common-place morality. Its effect arises, from the impression which the parts of the Poem separately, as well as the whole taken together, make upon the mind of the Reader; from the great examples which it sets before us, and the high sentiments with which it warms our hearts. The end which it proposes, is to extend our ideas of human perfection; or in other words, to excite admiration. Now this can be accomplished only, by proper representations of heroic deeds, and virtuous characters. For high virtue is the object, which all mankind are formed to admire; and, therefore, Epic Poems are, and must be, favourable to the cause of virtue. Valour, Truth, Justice, Fidelity, Friendship, Piety, Magnanimity, are the objects which, in the course of such Compositions, are presented to our minds, under the most splendid and honourable colours. In behalf of virtuous personages, our affections are engaged; in their designs, and their distresses, we are interested; the generous and public affections are awakened; the mind is purified

LECT. XLII.

from ſenſual and mean purſuits, and accuſtomed to take part in great, heroic enterpriſes. It is, indeed, no ſmall teſtimony in honour of virtue, that ſeveral of the moſt refined and elegant entertainments of mankind, ſuch as that ſpecies of Poetical Compoſition which we now conſider, muſt be grounded on moral ſentiments and impreſſions. This is a teſtimony of ſuch weight, that, were it in the power of ſceptical Philoſophers, to weaken the force of thoſe reaſonings which eſtabliſh the eſſential diſtinction between Vice and Virtue, the writings of Epic Poets alone were ſufficient to refute their falſe Philoſophy; ſhowing, by that appeal which they conſtantly make to the feelings of mankind in favour of virtue, that the foundations of it are laid, deep and ſtrong, in human nature.

The general ſtrain and ſpirit of Epic Compoſition, ſufficiently mark its diſtinction from the other kinds of Poetry. In Paſtoral Writing, the reigning idea is, innocence and tranquillity. Compaſſion, is the great object of Tragedy; Ridicule, the province of Comedy. The predominant character of the Epic is, admiration excited by heroic actions. It is ſufficiently diſtinguiſhed from Hiſtory, both by its poetical form, and the liberty of fiction which it aſſumes. It is a more calm compoſition than Tragedy. It admits, nay requires, the pathetic

LECT. XLII.

pathetic and the violent, on particular occaſions; but the pathetic is not expected to be its general character. It requires, more than any other ſpecies of Poetry, a grave, equal, and ſupported dignity. It takes in a greater compaſs of time and action, than Dramatic Writing admits; and thereby allows a more full diſplay of characters. Dramatic Writing, diſplays characters chiefly by means of ſentiments and paſſions; Epic Poetry, chiefly by means of actions. The emotions, therefore, which it raiſes, are not ſo violent, but they are more prolonged.—Theſe are the general characteriſtics of this ſpecies of Compoſition. But, in order to give a more particular and critical view of it, let us conſider the Epic Poem under three heads; firſt, with reſpect to the Subject, or Action; ſecondly, with reſpect to the Actors, or Characters; and laſtly, with reſpect to the Narration of the Poet.

The Action, or Subject of the Epic Poem, muſt have three properties; it muſt be one; it muſt be great; it muſt be intereſting.

First, It muſt be one Action, or Enterpriſe, which the Poet chooſes for his ſubject. I have frequently had occaſion to remark the importance of unity, in many kinds of Compoſition, in order to make a full and ſtrong impreſſion upon the mind. With the higheſt reaſon,

LECT. XLII.

Ariſtotle inſiſts upon this, as eſſential to Epic Poetry; and it is, indeed, the moſt material of all his rules reſpecting it. For it is certain, that, in the recital of heroic adventures, ſeveral ſcattered and independent facts can never affect a Reader ſo deeply, nor engage his attention ſo ſtrongly, as a tale that is one and connected, where the ſeveral incidents hang upon one another, and are all made to conſpire for the accompliſhment of one end. In a regular Epic, the more ſenſible this unity is rendered to the imagination, the better will be the effect; and for this reaſon, as Ariſtotle has obſerved, it is not ſufficient for the Poet to confine himſelf to the actions of one man, or to thoſe which happened during a certain period of time; but the unity muſt lie in the ſubject itſelf, and ariſe from all the parts combining into one whole.

In all the great Epic Poems, unity of action is ſufficiently apparent. Virgil, for inſtance, has choſen for his ſubject, the eſtabliſhment of Æneas in Italy. From the beginning to the end of the Poem, this object is ever in our view, and links all the parts of it together with full connection. The unity of the Odyſſey is of the ſame nature; the return and reeſtabliſhment of Ulyſſes in his own country. The ſubject of Taſſo, is the recovery of Jeruſalem from the Infidels; that of Milton, the expulſion

LECT. XLII.

expulsion of our first parents from Paradise; and both of them are unexceptionable in the unity of the Story. The professed subject of the Iliad, is the anger of Achilles, with the consequences which it produced. The Greeks carry on many unsuccessful engagements against the Trojans, as long as they are deprived of the assistance of Achilles. Upon his being appeased and reconciled to Agamemnon, victory follows, and the Poem closes. It must be owned, however, that the unity, or connecting principle, is not quite so sensible to the imagination here, as in the Æneid. For, throughout many books of the Iliad, Achilles is out of sight; he is lost in inaction, and the fancy terminates on no other object, than the success of the two armies whom we see contending in war.

The unity of the Epic Action is not to be so strictly interpreted, as if it excluded all Episodes, or subordinate actions. It is necessary to observe here, that the term Episode is employed by Aristotle, in a different sense from what we now give to it. It was a term originally applied to Dramatic Poetry, and thence transferred to Epic; and by Episodes, in an Epic Poem, it should seem that Aristotle understood the extension of the general Fable, or plan of the Poem, into all its circumstances. What his meaning was, is, indeed, not very

LECT. XLII.

clear; and this obſcurity has occaſioned much altercation among Critical Writers. Boſſu, in particular, is ſo perplexed upon this ſubject, as to be almoſt unintelligible. But, diſmiſſing ſo fruitleſs a controverſy, what we now underſtand by Epiſodes, are certain actions, or incidents, introduced into the narration, connected with the principal action, yet not of ſuch importance as to deſtroy, if they had been omitted, the main ſubject of the Poem. Of this nature are the interview of Hector with Andromache, in the Iliad; the ſtory of Cacus, and that of Niſus and Euryalus, in the Æneid; the adventures of Tancred with Erminia and Clorinda, in the Jeruſalem; and the proſpect of his deſcendants exhibited to Adam, in the laſt books of Paradiſe Loſt.

Such Epiſodes as theſe, are not only permitted to an Epic Poet; but, provided they be properly executed, are great ornaments to his work. The rules regarding them are the following:

First, They muſt be naturally introduced; they muſt have a ſufficient connection with the ſubject of the Poem; they muſt ſeem inferior parts that belong to it; not mere appendages ſtuck to it. The Epiſode of Olindo and Sophronia, in the ſecond book of Taſſo's Jeruſalem, is faulty, by tranſgreſſing this rule.

It

LECT. XLII.

It is too much detached from the reſt of the work; and being introduced ſo near the opening of the Poem, miſleads the Reader into an expectation, that it is to be of ſome future conſequence; whereas it proves to be connected with nothing that follows. In proportion as any Epiſode is ſlightly related to the main ſubject, it ſhould always be the ſhorter. The paſſion of Dido in the Æneid, and the ſnares of Armida in the Jeruſalem, which are expanded ſo fully in theſe Poems, cannot, with propriety, be called Epiſodes. They are conſtituent parts of the work, and form a conſiderable ſhare of the intrigue of the Poem.

In the next place, Epiſodes ought to preſent to us, objects of a different kind, from thoſe which go before, and thoſe which follow, in the courſe of the Poem. For, it is principally for the ſake of variety, that Epiſodes are introduced into an Epic Compoſition. In ſo long a work, they tend to diverſify the ſubject, and to relieve the Reader, by ſhifting the ſcene. In the midſt of combats, therefore, an Epiſode of the martial kind would be out of place; whereas, Hector's viſit to Andromache in the Iliad, and Erminia's adventure with the Shepherd in the Seventh Book of the Jeruſalem, afford us a well-judged and pleaſing retreat from camps and battles.

LECT. XLII.

LASTLY, As an Epiſode is a profeſſed embelliſhment, it ought to be particularly elegant and well-finiſhed; and, accordingly, it is, for the moſt part, in pieces of this kind, that Poets put forth their ſtrength. The Epiſodes of Teribazus and Ariana, in Leonidas, and of the death of Hercules, in the Epigoniad, are the two greateſt beauties in theſe Poems.

THE unity of the Epic Action neceſſarily ſuppoſes, that the Action be entire and complete; that is, as Ariſtotle well expreſſes it, that it have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Either by relating the whole, in his own perſon, or by introducing ſome of his Actors to relate what had paſſed before the opening of the Poem, the Author muſt always contrive to give us full information of every thing that belongs to his ſubject; he muſt not leave our curioſity, in any article, ungratified; he muſt bring us preciſely to the accompliſhment of his plan; and then conclude.

THE ſecond property of the Epic Action, is, that it be great; that it have ſufficient ſplendour and importance, both to fix our attention, and to juſtify the magnificent apparatus which the Poet beſtows upon it. This is ſo evidently requiſite as not to require illuſtration;

tration; and, indeed, hardly any who have attempted Epic Poetry, have failed in chooſing ſome ſubject ſufficiently important, either by the nature of the action, or by the fame of the perſonages concerned in it.

It contributes to the grandeur of the Epic Subject, that it be not of a modern date, nor fall within any period of hiſtory with which we are intimately acquainted. Both Lucan and Voltaire have, in the choice of their ſubjects, tranſgreſſed this rule, and they have, upon that account, ſucceeded worſe. Antiquity is favourable to thoſe high and auguſt ideas, which Epic Poetry is deſigned to raiſe. It tends to aggrandiſe, in our imagination, both perſons and events; and, what is ſtill more material, it allows the Poet the liberty of adorning his ſubject by means of fiction. Whereas, as ſoon as he comes within the verge of real and authenticated hiſtory, this liberty is abridged. He muſt either confine himſelf wholly, as Lucan has done, to ſtrict hiſtorical truth, at the expence of rendering his ſtory jejune; or, if he goes beyond it, like Voltaire in his Henriade, this diſadvantage follows, that, in well-known events, the true and the fictitious parts of the plan do not naturally mingle, and incorporate with each other. Theſe obſervations cannot be applied

to

LECT. XLII.

to Dramatic Writing; where the perſonages are exhibited to us, not ſo much that we may admire, as that we may love or pity them. Such paſſions are much more conſiſtent with the familiar hiſtorical knowledge of the perſons who are to be the objects of them; and even require them to be diſplayed in the light, and with the failings, of ordinary men. Modern, and well-known hiſtory, therefore, may furniſh very proper materials for tragedy. But for Epic Poetry, where Heroiſm is the groundwork, and where the object in view is to excite admiration, antient or traditionary hiſtory is aſſuredly the ſafeſt region. There, the Author may lay hold on names, and characters, and events, not wholly unknown, on which to build his Story; while, at the ſame time, by reaſon of the diſtance of the period, or of the remoteneſs of the ſcene, ſufficient licence is left him for fiction and invention.

THE third property required in the Epic Poem, is, that it be intereſting. It is not ſufficient for this purpoſe that it be great. For deeds of mere valour, how heroic ſoever, may prove cold and tireſome. Much will depend on the happy choice of ſome ſubject, which ſhall, by its nature, intereſt the Public; as when the Poet ſelects for his Hero, one who is the founder, or the deliverer, or the favourite of his

his nation; or when he writes of atchievements that have been highly celebrated, or have been connected with important conſequences to any public cauſe. Moſt of the great Epic Poems are abundantly fortunate in this reſpect, and muſt have been very intereſting to thoſe ages and countries in which they were compoſed. LECT. XLII.

But the chief circumſtance which renders an Epic Poem intereſting, and which tends to intereſt, not one age or country alone, but all Readers, is the ſkilful conduct of the Author in the management of his ſubject. He muſt ſo contrive his plan, as that it ſhall comprehend many affecting incidents. He muſt not dazzle us perpetually with valiant atchievements; for all Readers tire of conſtant fighting, and battles; but he muſt ſtudy to touch our hearts. He may ſometimes be awful and auguſt; he muſt often be tender and pathetic; he muſt give us gentle and pleaſing ſcenes of love, friendſhip, and affection. The more an Epic Poem abounds with ſituations which awaken the feelings of humanity, the more intereſting it is; and theſe form, always, the favourite paſſages of the work. I know no Epic Poets ſo happy in this reſpect as Virgil and Taſſo.

Much, too, depends on the characters of the Heroes, for rendering the Poem intereſting;

LECT. XLII.

ing; that they be ſuch, as ſhall ſtrongly attach the Readers, and make them take part in the dangers which the Heroes encounter. Theſe dangers, or obſtacles, form what is called the Nodus, or the Intrigue of the Epic Poem; in the judicious conduct of which, conſiſts much of the Poet's art. He muſt rouſe our attention, by a proſpect of the difficulties which ſeem to threaten diſappointment to the enterprize of his favourite perſonages; he muſt make theſe difficulties grow and thicken upon us by degrees; till, after having kept us, for ſome time, in a ſtate of agitation and ſuſpenſe, he paves the way, by a proper preparation of incidents, for the winding up of the plot in a natural and probable manner. It is plain, that every tale which is deſigned to engage attention, muſt be conducted on a plan of this ſort.

A QUESTION has been moved, whether the nature of the Epic Poem does not require that it ſhould always end ſucceſsfully? Moſt Critics are inclined to think, that a ſucceſsful iſſue is the moſt proper; and they appear to have reaſon on their ſide. An unhappy concluſion depreſſes the mind, and is oppoſite to the elevating emotions which belong to this ſpecies of Poetry. Terror and compaſſion are the proper ſubjects of tragedy; but as the Epic Poem is of larger compaſs and extent, it were

were too much, if, after the difficulties and troubles which commonly abound in the progreſs of the Poem, the Author ſhould bring them all at laſt to an unfortunate iſſue. Accordingly, the general practice of Epic Poets is on the ſide of a proſperous concluſion; not, however, without ſome exceptions. For two Authors of great name, Lucan and Milton, have held a contrary courſe; the one concluding with the ſubverſion of the Roman liberty; the other, with the expulſion of man from paradiſe. LECT. XLII.

With regard to the time or duration of the Epic Action, no preciſe boundaries can be aſcertained. A conſiderable extent is always allowed to it, as it does not neceſſarily depend on thoſe violent paſſions which can be ſuppoſed to have only a ſhort continuance. The Iliad, which is formed upon the anger of Achilles, has, with propriety, the ſhorteſt duration of any of the great Epic Poems. According to Boſſu, the action laſts no longer than forty-ſeven days. The action of the Odyſſey, computed from the taking of Troy to the peace of Ithaca, extends to eight years and a half; and the action of the Æneid, computed in the ſame way, from the taking of Troy to the death of Turnus, includes about ſix years. But if we meaſure the period only of the Poet's own narration, or compute from the time in which the Hero

SECT. XLII. Hero makes his firſt appearance, till the concluſion, the duration of both theſe laſt Poems is brought within a much ſmaller compaſs. The Odyſſey beginning with Ulyſſes in the iſland of Calypſo, comprehends fifty-eight days only; and the Æneid, beginning with the ſtorm, which throws Æneas upon the coaſt of Africa, is reckoned to include, at the moſt, a year and ſome months.

HAVING thus treated of the Epic Action, or the Subject of the Poem, I proceed next to make ſome obſervations on the Actors or Perſonages.

As it is the buſineſs of an Epic Poet to copy after nature, and to form a probable intereſting tale, he muſt ſtudy to give all his perſonages proper and well-ſupported characters, ſuch as diſplay the features of human nature. This is what Ariſtotle calls, giving manners to the Poem. It is by no means neceſſary, that all his actors be morally good; imperfect, nay, vicious characters may find a proper place; though the nature of Epic Poetry ſeems to require, that the principal figures exhibited ſhould be ſuch as tend to raiſe admiration and love, rather than hatred or contempt. But whatever the character be which a Poet gives to any of his actors, he muſt take care to preſerve it uniform, and conſiſtent with itſelf. Every thing which that perſon ſays, or does,

LECT. XLII.

muſt be ſuited to it, and muſt ſerve to diſtinguiſh him from any other.

Poetic characters may be divided into two kinds, general and particular. General characters are, ſuch as wiſe, brave, virtuous, without any farther diſtinction. Particular characters expreſs the ſpecies of bravery, of wiſdom, of virtue, for which any one is eminent. They exhibit the peculiar features which diſtinguiſh one individual from another, which mark the difference of the ſame moral quality in different men, according as it is combined with other diſpoſitions in their temper. In drawing ſuch particular characters, genius is chiefly exerted. How far each of the three great Epic Poets have diſtinguiſhed themſelves in this part of Compoſition, I ſhall have occaſion afterwards to ſhow, when I come to make remarks upon their works. It is ſufficient now to mention, that it is in this part Homer has principally excelled; Taſſo has come the neareſt to Homer; and Virgil has been the moſt deficient.

It has been the practice of all Epic Poets, to ſelect ſome one perſonage, whom they diſtinguiſh above all the reſt, and make the hero of the tale. This is conſidered as eſſential to Epic Compoſition, and is attended with ſeveral advantages. It renders the unity of the ſubject

LECT. XLII.

ſubject more ſenſible, when there is one principal figure, to which, as to a centre, all the reſt refer. It tends to intereſt us more in the enterprize which is carried on; and it gives the Poet an opportunity of exerting his talents for adorning, and diſplaying one character, with peculiar ſplendour. It has been aſked, Who then is the hero of Paradiſe Loſt? The Devil, it has been anſwered by ſome Critics; and, in conſequence of this idea, much ridicule and cenſure has been thrown upon Milton. But they have miſtaken that Author's intention, by proceeding upon a ſuppoſition, that, in the concluſion of the Poem, the hero muſt needs be triumphant. Whereas Milton followed a different plan, and has given a tragic concluſion to a Poem, otherwiſe Epic in its form. For Adam is undoubtedly his hero; that is, the capital and moſt intereſting figure in his Poem.

Besides human actors, there are perſonages of another kind, that uſually occupy no ſmall place in Epic Poetry, I mean the gods, or ſupernatural beings. This brings us to the conſideration of what is called the Machinery of the Epic Poem; the moſt nice and difficult part of the ſubject. Critics appear to me to have gone to extremes on both ſides. Almoſt all the French Critics decide in favour of Machinery, as eſſential to the conſtitution of an

LECT. XLII.

an Epic Poem. They quote that ſentence of Petronius Arbiter, as if it were an oracle, "per ambages, Deorumque miniſteria, pre-"cipitandus eſt liber ſpiritus," and hold, that though a Poem had every other requiſite that could be demanded, yet it could not be ranked in the Epic claſs, unleſs the main action was carried on by the intervention of the gods. This deciſion ſeems to be founded on no principle or reaſon whatever, unleſs a ſuperſtitious reverence for the practice of Homer and Virgil. Theſe Poets very properly embelliſhed their ſtory by the traditional tales and popular legends of their own country; according to which, all the great tranſactions of the heroic times were intermixed with the fables of their deities. But does it thence follow, that in other countries, and other ages, where there is not the like advantage of current ſuperſtition, and popular credulity, Epic Poetry muſt be wholly confined to antiquated fictions, and fairy tales? Lucan has compoſed a very ſpirited Poem, certainly of the Epic kind, where neither gods nor ſupernatural beings are at all employed. The Author of Leonidas has made an attempt of the ſame kind, not without ſucceſs; and beyond doubt, wherever a Poet gives us a regular heroic ſtory, well connected in its parts, adorned with characters, and ſupported with proper dignity and elevation, though his

LECT. XLII.

agents be every one of them human, he has fulfilled the chief requiſites of this ſort of Compoſition, and has a juſt title to be claſſed with Epic Writers.

But though I cannot admit that Machinery is neceſſary or eſſential to the Epic plan, neither can I agree with ſome late Critics of conſiderable name, who are for excluding it totally, as inconſiſtent with that probability and impreſſion of reality, which, they think, ſhould reign in this kind of Writing *. Mankind do not conſider Poetical Writings with ſo philoſophical an eye. They ſeek entertainment from them; and for the bulk of Readers, indeed for almoſt all men, the marvellous has a great charm. It gratifies and fills the imagination; and gives room for many a ſtriking and ſublime deſcription. In Epic Poetry, in particular, where admiration and lofty ideas are ſuppoſed to reign, the marvellous and ſupernatural find, if any where, their proper place. They both enable the Poet to aggrandize his ſubject, by means of thoſe auguſt and ſolemn objects which Religion introduces into it; and they allow him to enlarge and diverſify his plan, by comprehending within it heaven, and earth, and hell, men and inviſible beings, and the whole circle of the Univerſe.

* See Elem. of Criticiſm, ch. 22.

At

LECT. XLII.

At the ſame time, in the uſe of this ſupernatural Machinery, it becomes a Poet to be temperate and prudent. He is not at liberty to invent what ſyſtem of the marvellous he pleaſes. It muſt always have ſome foundation in popular belief. He muſt avail himſelf in a decent manner, either of the religious faith, or the ſuperſtitious credulity of the country wherein he lives, or of which he writes, ſo as to give an air of probability to events which are moſt contrary to the common courſe of Nature. Whatever Machinery he employs, he muſt take care not to overload us with it; not to withdraw human actions and manners too much from view, nor to obſcure them under a cloud of incredible fictions. He muſt always remember, that his chief buſineſs is to relate to men, the actions and the exploits of men; that it is by theſe principally he is to intereſt us, and to touch our hearts; and that if probability be altogether baniſhed from his work, it can never make a deep or a laſting impreſſion. Indeed, I know nothing more difficult in Epic Poetry, than to adjuſt properly the mixture of the marvellous with the probable; ſo as to gratify and amuſe us with the one, without ſacrificing the other. I need hardly obſerve, that theſe obſervations affect not the conduct of Milton's work; whoſe plan being altogether theological, his ſupernatural

LECT. XLII.

beings form not the machinery, but are the principal actors in the Poem.

With regard to Allegorical Perſonages, Fame, Diſcord, Love, and the like, it may be ſafely pronounced, that they form the worſt machinery of any. In deſcription they are ſometimes allowable, and may ſerve for embelliſhment; but they ſhould never be permitted to bear any ſhare in the action of the Poem. For being plain and declared fictions, mere names of general ideas, to which even fancy cannot attribute any exiſtence as perſons, if they are introduced as mingling with human actors, an intolerable confuſion of ſhadows and realities ariſes, and all conſiſtency of action is utterly deſtroyed.

In the Narration of the Poet, which is the laſt head that remains to be conſidered, it is not material, whether he relate the whole ſtory in his own character, or introduce ſome of his perſonages to relate any part of the action that had paſſed before the Poem opens. Homer follows the one method in his Iliad, and the other in his Odyſſey. Virgil has, in this reſpect, imitated the conduct of the Odyſſey; Taſſo that of the Iliad. The chief advantage which ariſes from any of the actors being employed to relate part of the ſtory, is, that it allows

lows the Poet, if he chooſes it, to open with ſome intereſting ſituation of affairs, informing us afterwards of what had paſſed before that period; and gives him the greater liberty of ſpreading out ſuch parts of the ſubject as he is inclined to dwell upon in perſon, and of comprehending the reſt within a ſhort recital. Where the ſubject is of great extent, and comprehends the tranſactions of ſeveral years, as in the Odyſſey and the Æneid, this method therefore ſeems preferable. When the ſubject is of ſmaller compaſs, and ſhorter duration, as in the Iliad and the Jeruſalem, the Poet may, without diſadvantage, relate the whole in his own perſon.

In the propoſition of the ſubject, the invocation of the Muſe, and other ceremonies of the introduction, Poets may vary at their pleaſure. It is perfectly trifling to make theſe little formalities the object of preciſe rule, any farther, than that the ſubject of the work ſhould always be clearly propoſed, and without affected or unſuitable pomp. For, according to Horace's noted rule, no Introduction ſhould ever ſet out too high, or promiſe too much, leſt the Author ſhould not fulfil the expectations he has raiſed.

What is of moſt importance in the tenor of the narration is, that it be perſpicuous, ani-

LECT. XLII.

mated, and enriched with all the beauties of Poetry. No ſort of Compoſition requires more ſtrength, dignity, and fire, than the Epic Poem. It is the region within which we look for every thing that is ſublime in deſcription, tender in ſentiment, and bold and lively in expreſſion; and therefore, though an Author's plan ſhould be faultleſs, and his ſtory ever ſo well conducted, yet, if he be feeble, or flat in Style, deſtitute of affecting ſcenes, and deficient in poetical colouring, he can have no ſucceſs. The ornaments which Epic Poetry admits, muſt all be of the grave and chaſte kind. Nothing that is looſe, ludicrous, or affected, finds any place there. All the objects which it preſents ought to be either great, or tender, or pleaſing. Deſcriptions of diſguſting or ſhocking objects, ſhould as much as poſſible be avoided; and therefore the fable of the Harpies, in the third book of the Æneid, and the allegory of Sin and Death, in the ſecond book of Paradiſe Loſt, had been better omitted in theſe celebrated Poems.

LECTURE XLIII.

HOMER's ILIAD AND ODYSSEY—VIRGIL's ÆNEID.

LECT. XLIII.

AS the Epic Poem is univerſally allowed to poſſeſs the higheſt rank among Poetical Works, it merits a particular diſcuſſion. Having treated of the nature of this Compoſition, and the principal rules relating to it, I proceed to make ſome obſervations on the moſt diſtinguiſhed Epic Poems, Antient and Modern.

HOMER claims, on every account, our firſt attention, as the Father not only of Epic Poetry, but, in ſome meaſure, of Poetry in general. Whoever ſits down to read Homer, muſt conſider that he is going to read the moſt antient book in the world, next to the Bible. Without making this reflection, he cannot enter into the ſpirit, nor reliſh the Compoſition of the Author. He is not to look for the correctneſs, and elegance, of the Auguſtan Age. He muſt diveſt himſelf of our modern ideas of

LECT. XLIII.

dignity and refinement, and tranſport his imagination almoſt three thouſand years back in the hiſtory of mankind. What he is to expect, is a picture of the antient world. He muſt reckon upon finding characters and manners, that retain a conſiderable tincture of the ſavage ſtate; moral ideas, as yet, imperfectly formed; and the appetites and paſſions of men brought under none of thoſe reſtraints, to which, in a more advanced ſtate of Society, they are accuſtomed; but bodily ſtrength, prized as one of the chief heroic endowments; the preparing of a meal, and the appeaſing of hunger, deſcribed as very intereſting objects; and the heroes boaſting of themſelves openly, ſcolding one another outrageouſly, and glorying, as we ſhould now think very indecently, over their fallen enemies.

The opening of the Iliad poſſeſſes none of that ſort of dignity, which a Modern looks for in a great Epic Poem. It turns on no higher ſubject, than the quarrel of two Chieftains about a female ſlave. The Prieſt of Apollo beſeeches Agamemnon to reſtore his daughter, who, in the plunder of a city, had fallen to Agamemnon's ſhare of booty. He refuſes. Apollo, at the prayer of his Prieſt, ſends a plague into the Grecian camp. The Augur, when conſulted, declares, that there is no way of appeaſing Apollo, but by reſtoring the

LECT. XLIII.

daughter of his Prieſt. Agamemnon is enraged at the Augur; profeſſes that he likes this ſlave better than his wife Clytemneſtra; but ſince he muſt reſtore her in order to ſave the army, inſiſts to have another in her place; and pitches upon Briſeis, the ſlave of Achilles. Achilles, as was to be expected, kindles into rage at this demand; reproaches him for his rapacity and inſolence, and, after giving him many hard names, ſolemnly ſwears, that, if he is to be thus treated by the General, he will withdraw his troops, and aſſiſt the Grecians no more againſt the Trojans. He withdraws accordingly. His mother, the Goddeſs Thetis, intereſts Jupiter in his cauſe; who, to revenge the wrong which Achilles had ſuffered, takes part againſt the Greeks, and ſuffers them to fall into great and long diſtreſs; until Achilles is pacified, and reconciliation brought about between him and Agamemnon.

Such is the baſis of the whole action of the Iliad. Hence riſe all thoſe "ſpecioſa mira-"cula," as Horace terms them, which fill that extraordinary Poem; and which have had the power of intereſting almoſt all the nations of Europe, during every age, ſince the days of Homer. The general admiration commanded by a poetical plan, ſo very different from what any one would have formed in our times, ought not, upon reflection, to be matter of ſurpriſe,

LECT. XLIII.

priſe. For, beſides that a fertile genius can enrich and beautify any ſubject on which it is employed, it is to be obſerved, that antient manners, how much ſoever they contradict our preſent notions of dignity and refinement, afford, nevertheleſs, materials for Poetry, ſuperior, in ſome reſpects, to thoſe which are furniſhed by a more poliſhed ſtate of Society. They diſcover human nature more open and undiſguiſed, without any of thoſe ſtudied forms of behaviour which now conceal men from one another. They give free ſcope to the ſtrongeſt and moſt impetuous emotions of the mind, which make a better figure in deſcription, than calm and temperate feelings. They ſhow us our native prejudices, appetites, and deſires, exerting themſelves without controul. From this ſtate of manners, joined with the advantage of that ſtrong and expreſſive Style, which, as I formerly obſerved, commonly diſtinguiſhes the Compoſitions of early ages, we have ground to look for more of the boldneſs, eaſe, and freedom of native genius, in Compoſitions of ſuch a period, than in thoſe of more civilized times. And, accordingly, the two great characters of the Homeric Poetry are, Fire and Simplicity. Let us now proceed to make ſome more particular obſervations on the Iliad, under the three heads of the Subject and Action, the Characters, and Narration of the Poet.

THE

LECT. XLIII.

THE Subject of the Iliad muſt unqueſtionably be admitted to be, in the main, happily choſen. In the days of Homer, no object could be more ſplendid and dignified than the Trojan war. So great a confederacy of the Grecian States, under one leader; and the ten years ſiege which they carried on againſt Troy, muſt have ſpread far abroad the renown of many military exploits, and intereſted all Greece in the traditions concerning the Heroes who had moſt eminently ſignalized themſelves. Upon theſe traditions, Homer grounded his Poem; and though he lived, as is generally believed, only two or three centuries after the Trojan war, yet, through the want of written records, tradition muſt, by his time, have fallen into the degree of obſcurity moſt proper for Poetry; and have left him at full liberty to mix as much fable as he pleaſed, with the remains of true hiſtory. He has not choſen, for his ſubject, the whole Trojan war; but, with great judgment, he has ſelected one part of it, the quarrel betwixt Achilles and Agamemnon, and the events to which that quarrel gave riſe; which, though they take up forty-ſeven days only, yet include the moſt intereſting, and moſt critical period of the war. By this management, he has given greater unity to what would have otherwiſe been an unconnected hiſtory of battles. He has gained one Hero, or principal character, Achilles, who reigns throughout

LECT. XLIII.

out the work; and he has ſhown the pernicious effect of diſcord among confederated princes. At the ſame time, I admit that Homer is leſs fortunate in his ſubject than Virgil. The plan of the Æneid includes a greater compaſs, and a more agreeable diverſity of events; whereas the Iliad is almoſt entirely filled with battles.

The praiſe of high invention has in every age been given to Homer, with the greateſt reaſon. The prodigious number of incidents, of ſpeeches, of characters divine and human, with which he abounds; the ſurpriſing variety with which he has diverſified his battles, in the wounds and deaths, and little hiſtory-pieces of almoſt all the perſons ſlain, diſcover an invention next to boundleſs. But the praiſe of judgment is, in my opinion, no leſs due to Homer, than that of invention. His ſtory is all along conducted with great art. He riſes upon us gradually; his Heroes are brought out, one after another, to be objects of our attention. The diſtreſs thickens, as the Poem advances; and every thing is ſo contrived as to aggrandize Achilles, and to render him, as the Poet intended he ſhould be, the capital figure.

But that wherein Homer excels all Writers, is the characteriſtical part. Here, he is without a rival. His lively and ſpirited exhibition of

LECT. XLIII.

of characters, is, in a great meaſure, owing to his being ſo dramatic a Writer, abounding every where with dialogue and converſation. There is much more dialogue in Homer than in Virgil; or, indeed, than in any other Poet. What Virgil informs us of by two words of Narration, Homer brings about by a Speech. We may obſerve here, that this method of Writing is more antient than the narrative manner. Of this we have a clear proof in the Books of the Old Teſtament, which, inſtead of Narration, abound with Speeches, with anſwers and replies, upon the moſt familiar ſubjects. Thus, in the Book of Geneſis: "Joſeph "ſaid unto his brethren, Whence come ye? "and they anſwered, From the land of Canaan "we come to buy food. And Joſeph ſaid, "Ye are ſpies; to ſee the nakedneſs of the "land are ye come. And they ſaid unto him, "Nay, my Lord, but to buy food are thy "ſervants come; we are all one man's ſons, "we are true men, thy ſervants are no ſpies. "And he ſaid unto them, Nay, but to ſee the "nakedneſs of the land ye are come. And "they ſaid, Thy ſervants are twelve brethren, "the ſons of one man in the land of Canaan; "and behold the youngeſt is this day with our "father; and one is not. And Joſeph ſaid "unto them, This it is that I ſpake unto you, "ſaying ye are ſpies. Hereby ye ſhall be "proved; by the life of Pharaoh, ye ſhall not

"go

LECT. XLIII.

"go forth, except your youngeſt brother come "hither, &c." Geneſis, xlii. 7—15. Such a Style as this, is the moſt ſimple and artleſs form of Writing; and muſt, therefore, undoubtedly have been the moſt antient. It is copying directly from nature; giving a plain rehearſal of what paſſed, or was ſuppoſed to paſs, in converſation between the perſons of whom the Author treats. In progreſs of time, when the Art of Writing was more ſtudied, it was thought more elegant to compreſs the ſubſtance of converſation into ſhort diſtinct narrative, made by the Poet or Hiſtorian in his own perſon; and to reſerve direct ſpeeches for ſolemn occaſions only.

The Antient Dramatic method which Homer practiſed, has ſome advantages, balanced with ſome defects. It renders Compoſition more natural and animated, and more expreſſive of manners and characters; but withal leſs grave and majeſtic, and ſometimes tireſome. Homer, it muſt be admitted, has carried his propenſity to the making of Speeches too far; and if he be tedious any where, it is in theſe; ſome of them trifling, and ſome of them plainly unſeaſonable. Together with the Greek vivacity, he leaves upon our minds, ſome impreſſion of the Greek loquacity alſo. His Speeches, however, are upon the whole characteriſtic and lively; and to them we owe, in a great

LECT. XLIII.

great meaſure, that admirable diſplay which he has given of human nature. Every one who reads him, becomes familiarly and intimately acquainted with his Heroes. We ſeem to have lived among them, and to have converſed with them. Not only has he purſued the ſingle virtue of courage, through all its different forms and features, in his different warriors; but ſome more delicate characters, into which courage either enters not at all, or but for an inconſiderable part, he has drawn with ſingular art.

How finely, for inſtance, has he painted the character of Helen, ſo as, notwithſtanding her frailty and her crimes, to prevent her from being an odious object! The admiration with which the old generals behold her, in the Third Book, when ſhe is coming towards them, preſents her to us with much dignity. Her veiling herſelf and ſhedding tears, her confuſion in the preſence of Priam, her grief and ſelf-accuſations at the ſight of Menelaus, her upbraiding Paris for his cowardice, and, at the ſame time, her returning fondneſs for him, exhibit the moſt ſtriking features of that mixed female character, which we partly condemn, and partly pity. Homer never introduces her, without making her ſay ſomething to move our compaſſion; while, at the ſame time, he takes care to contraſt her character with that

LECT. XLIII.

of a virtuous matron, in the chaſte and tender Andromache.

PARIS himſelf, the Author of all the miſchief, is characteriſed with the utmoſt propriety. He is, as we ſhould expect him, a mixture of gallantry and effeminacy. He retreats from Menelaus, on his firſt appearance; but immediately afterwards, enters into ſingle combat with him. He is a great maſter of civility, remarkably courteous in his ſpeeches; and receives all the reproofs of his brother Hector with modeſty and deference. He is deſcribed as a perſon of elegance and taſte. He was the Architect of his own Palace. He is, in the Sixth Book, found by Hector, burniſhing and dreſſing up his armour; and iſſues forth to battle with a peculiar gaiety and oſtentation of appearance, which is illuſtrated by one of the fineſt compariſons in all the Iliad, that of the horſe prancing to the river.

HOMER has been blamed for making his hero Achilles of too brutal and inamiable a character. But I am inclined to think, that injuſtice is commonly done to Achilles, upon the credit of two lines of Horace, who has certainly overloaded his character.

Impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer,
Jura negat ſibi nata; nihil non arrogat armis.

ACHILLES

ACHILLES is paſſionate indeed, to a great degree; but he is far from being a contemner of laws and juſtice. In the conteſt with Agamemnon, though he carries it on with too much heat, yet he has reaſon on his ſide. He was notoriouſly wronged; but he ſubmits; and reſigns Briſeis peaceably, when the heralds come to demand her; only, he will fight no longer under the command of a leader who had affronted him. Beſides his wonderful bravery and contempt of death, he has ſeveral other qualities of a Hero. He is open and ſincere. He loves his ſubjects, and reſpects the Gods. He is diſtinguiſhed by ſtrong friendſhips and attachments; he is, throughout, high ſpirited, gallant, and honourable; and allowing for a degree of ferocity which belonged to the times, and enters into the characters of moſt of Homer's Heroes, he is, upon the whole, abundantly fitted to raiſe high admiration, though not pure eſteem.

UNDER the head of Characters, Homer's Gods or his Machinery, according to the critical term, come under conſideration. The Gods make a great figure in the Iliad; much greater indeed than they do in the Æneid, or in any other Epic Poem; and hence Homer has become the ſtandard of Poetic Theology. Concerning Machinery in general, I delivered my ſentiments in the former Lecture. Con-

LECT. XLIII.

cerning Homer's Machinery, in particular, we muſt obſerve, that it was not his own invention. Like every other good Poet, he unqueſtionably followed the traditions of his country. The age of the Trojan war approached to the age of the Gods, and Demigods, in Greece. Several of the Heroes concerned in that war, were reputed to be the children of theſe Gods. Of courſe, the traditionary tales relating to them, and to the exploits of that age, were blended with the Fables of the Deities. Theſe popular legends, Homer very properly adopted; though it is perfectly abſurd to infer from this, that therefore Poets ariſing in ſucceeding ages, and writing on quite different ſubjects, are obliged to follow the ſame ſyſtem of Machinery.

In the hands of Homer, it produces, on the whole, a noble effect; it is always gay and amuſing; often, lofty and magnificent. It introduces into his Poem a great number of perſonages, almoſt as much diſtinguiſhed by characters as his human actors. It diverſifies his battles greatly, by the intervention of the Gods; and by frequently ſhifting the ſcene from earth to heaven, it gives an agreeable relief to the mind, in the midſt of ſo much blood and ſlaughter. Homer's Gods, it muſt be confeſſed, though they be always lively and animated figures, yet ſometimes want dignity.

The

LECT. XLIII.

The conjugal contentions between Juno and Jupiter, with which he entertains us, and the indecent ſquabbles he deſcribes among the inferior Deities, according as they take different ſides with the contending parties, would be very improper models for any modern Poet to imitate. In apology for Homer, however, it muſt be remembered, that according to the Fables of thoſe days, the Gods are but one remove above the condition of men. They have all the human paſſions. They drink and feaſt, and are vulnerable like men; they have children, and kinſmen, in the oppoſite armies; and except that they are immortal, that they have houſes on the top of Olympus, and winged chariots, in which they are often flying down to earth, and then re-aſcending, in order to feaſt on Nectar and Ambroſia; they are in truth no higher beings than the human Heroes, and therefore very fit to take part in their contentions. At the ſame time, though Homer ſo frequently degrades his divinities, yet he knows how to make them appear, in ſome conjunctures, with the moſt awful Majeſty. Jupiter, the Father of Gods and Men, is, for the moſt part, introduced with great dignity; and ſeveral of the moſt ſublime conceptions in the Iliad, are founded on the appearances of Neptune, Minerva, and Apollo, on great occaſions.

LECT. XLIII.

With regard to Homer's Style and manner of Writing, it is eaſy, natural, and in the higheſt degree animated. It will be admired by ſuch only as reliſh antient ſimplicity, and can make allowance for certain negligences and repetitions, which greater refinement in the Art of Writing has taught ſucceeding, though far inferior, Poets to avoid. For Homer is the moſt ſimple in his Style of all the great Poets, and reſembles moſt the Style of the poetical parts of the Old Teſtament. They can have no conception of his manner, who are acquainted with him in Mr. Pope's Tranſlation only. An excellent poetical performance that Tranſlation is, and faithful in the main to the Original. In ſome places, it may be thought to have even improved Homer. It has certainly ſoftened ſome of his rudeneſſes, and added delicacy and grace to ſome of his ſentiments. But withal, it is no other than Homer moderniſed. In the midſt of the elegance and luxuriancy of Mr. Pope's language, we loſe ſight of the old Bard's ſimplicity. I know indeed no Author, to whom it is more difficult to do juſtice in a Tranſlation, than Homer. As the plainneſs of his diction, were it literally rendered, would often appear flat in any modern language; ſo, in the midſt of that plainneſs, and not a little heightened by it, there are every where breaking forth upon us flaſhes of native fire, of ſublimity and beauty, which

LECT. XLIII.

which hardly any language, except his own, could preſerve. His Verſification has been univerſally acknowledged to be uncommonly melodious; and to carry, beyond that of any Poet, a reſemblance in the ſound to the ſenſe and meaning.

In Narration, Homer is, at all times, remarkably conciſe, which renders him lively and agreeable; though in his ſpeeches, as I have before admitted, ſometimes tedious. He is every where deſcriptive; and deſcriptive by means of thoſe well-choſen particulars, which form the excellency of deſcription. Virgil gives us the nod of Jupiter with great magnificence.

Annuit; et totum nutu tremefecit Olympum.

But Homer, in deſcribing the ſame thing, gives us the ſable eye-brows of Jupiter bent, and his ambroſial curls ſhaken, at the moment when he gives the nod; and thereby renders the figure more natural and lively. Whenever he ſeeks to draw our attention to ſome intereſting object, he particulariſes it ſo happily, as to paint it in a manner to our ſight. The ſhot of Pandarus' arrow, which broke the truce between the two armies, as related in the Fourth Book, may be given for an inſtance; and above all, the admirable interview of Hector with Andromache, in the Sixth Book; where

LECT. XLIII.

all the circumſtances of conjugal and parental tenderneſs, the child affrighted with the view of his Father's Helmet and Creſt, and clinging to the nurſe; Hector putting off his Helmet, taking the child into his arms, and offering up a prayer for him to the Gods; Andromache receiving back the child with a ſmile of pleaſure, and at the ſame inſtant, burſting into tears, δακρυσεν γελασασα, as it is finely expreſſed in the original, form the moſt natural and affecting picture that can poſſibly be imagined.

In the deſcription of Battles, Homer particularly excels. He works up the hurry, the terror, and confuſion of them in ſo maſterly a manner, as to place the Reader in the very midſt of the engagement. It is here, that the fire of his genius is moſt highly diſplayed; inſomuch, that Virgil's Battles, and indeed thoſe of moſt other Poets, are cold and inanimated in compariſon of Homer's.

With regard to Similies, no Poet abounds ſo much with them. Several of them are beyond doubt extremely beautiful: ſuch as thoſe, of the fires in the Trojan camp compared to the Moon and Stars by night; Paris going forth to Battle, to the war-horſe prancing to the river; and Euphorbus ſlain, to the flowering ſhrub cut down by a ſudden blaſt: all which are among the fineſt poetical paſſages

that are any where to be found. I am not, however, of opinion, that Homer's Compariſons, taken in general, are his greateſt beauties. They come too thick upon us; and often interrupt the train of his narration or deſcription. The reſemblance on which they are founded, is ſometimes not clear; and the objects whence they are taken, are too uniform. His Lions, Bulls, Eagles, and herds of Sheep, recur too frequently; and the alluſions in ſome of his Similies, even after the allowances that are to be made for antient manners, muſt be admitted to be debaſing*.

My

* The ſevereſt critic upon Homer in modern times, M. la Motte, admits all that his admirers urge for the ſuperiority of his genius and talents as a Poet: "C'étoit un "génie naturellement Poëtique, ami des Fables & des mer-"veilleux, et porté en général à l'imitation, ſoit des objets "de la nature, ſoit des ſentimens et des actions des hommes. "Il avoit l'eſprit vaſte et fécond; plus elevé que délicat, plus "naturel qu'ingenieux, et plus amoureux de l'abondance que "du choix.—Il a ſaiſi, par une ſupériorité de gout, les pré-"mieres idées de l'éloquence dans toutes les genres; il a "parlé la langage des toutes les paſſions; et il a du moins "ouvert aux écrivains qui doivent le ſuivre une infinité de "routes, qu'il ne reſtoit plus qu'à applanir. Il y a appa-"rence que en quelques temps qu' Homère eût veçu, il "eût été, du moins, le plus grand Poëte de ſon païs: et a "ne le prendre que dans ce ſens, on peut dire, qu'il eſt le "maître de ceux mêmes qui l'ont ſurpaſſé."—Diſcours ſur Homère. Oeuvres de la Motte. Tome 2de. After theſe high praiſes of the Author, he indeed endeavours to bring the merit of the Iliad very low. But his principal objections turn on the debaſing ideas which are there given of the Gods, the groſs characters and manners of the Heroes,

LECT. XLIII.

My obſervations, hitherto, have been made upon the Iliad only. It is neceſſary to take ſome notice of the Odyſſey alſo. Longinus's criticiſm upon it is not without foundation, that Homer may in this Poem be compared to the ſetting ſun, whoſe grandeur ſtill remains, without the heat of his meridian beams. It wants the vigour and ſublimity of the Iliad; yet, at the ſame time, poſſeſſes ſo many beauties, as to be juſtly entitled to high praiſe. It is a very amuſing Poem, and has much greater variety than the Iliad; it contains many intereſting ſtories, and beautiful deſcriptions. We ſee every where the ſame deſcriptive and dramatic genius, and the ſame fertility of invention that appears in the other work. It deſcends indeed from the dignity of Gods, and Heroes, and warlike atchievements; but in recompence, we have more pleaſing pictures of antient manners. Inſtead of that ferocity which reigns in the Iliad, the Odyſſey preſents us with the moſt amiable images of hoſpitality and humanity; entertains us with many a wonderful adventure, and many a landſcape of nature; and inſtructs us by a conſtant vein of morality and virtue, which runs through the Poem.

and the imperfect morality of the ſentiments; which, as Voltaire obſerves, is like accuſing a painter for having drawn his figures in the dreſs of the times. Homer painted his Gods, ſuch as popular tradition then repreſented them; and deſcribed ſuch characters and ſentiments, as he found among thoſe with whom he lived.

At

LECT. XLIII.

At the ſame time, there are ſome defects which muſt be acknowledged in the Odyſſey. Many ſcenes in it, fall below the majeſty which we naturally expect in an Epic Poem. The laſt Twelve Books, after Ulyſſes is landed in Ithaca, are, in ſeveral parts, tedious and languid; and though the diſcovery which Ulyſſes makes of himſelf to his Nurſe Euryclea, and his interview with Penelope before ſhe knows him, in the Nineteenth Book, are tender and affecting, yet the Poet does not ſeem happy in the great anagnoriſis, or the diſcovery of Ulyſſes to Penelope. She is too cautious and diſtruſtful, and we are diſappointed of the ſurpriſe of joy, which we expected on that high occaſion.

After having ſaid ſo much of the Father of Epic Poetry, it is now time to proceed to Virgil, who has a character clearly marked, and quite diſtinct from that of Homer. As the diſtinguiſhing excellencies of the Iliad are, Simplicity and Fire; thoſe of the Æneid are, Elegance and Tenderneſs. Virgil is, beyond doubt, leſs animated and leſs ſublime than Homer; but to counterbalance this, he has fewer negligencies, greater variety, and ſupports more of a correct and regular dignity, throughout his work.

When we begin to read the Iliad, we find ourſelves in the region of the moſt remote, and

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LECT. XLIII.

even unrefined antiquity. When we open the Æneid, we diſcover all the correctneſs, and the improvements, of the Auguſtan age. We meet with no contentions of heroes about a female ſlave; no violent ſcolding, nor abuſive language; but the Poem opens with the utmoſt magnificence; with Juno, forming deſigns for preventing Æneas's eſtabliſhment in Italy, and Æneas himſelf, preſented to us with all his fleet, in the middle of a ſtorm, which is deſcribed in the higheſt Style of Poetry.

THE ſubject of the Æneid is extremely happy; ſtill more ſo, in my opinion, than either of Homer's Poems. As nothing could be more noble, nor carry more of Epic dignity, ſo nothing could be more flattering and intereſting to the Roman people, than Virgil's deriving the origin of their ſtate from ſo famous a hero as Æneas. The object was ſplendid in itſelf; it gave the Poet a theme, taken from the antient traditionary hiſtory of his own country; it allowed him to connect his ſubject with Homer's ſtories, and to adopt all his mythology; it afforded him the opportunity of frequently glancing at all the future great exploits of the Romans, and of deſcribing Italy, and the very territory of Rome, in its antient and fabulous ſtate. The eſtabliſhment of Æneas conſtantly traverſed by Juno, leads to a great diverſity of events, of voyages, and wars; and

furniſhes

furniſhes a proper intermixture of the incidents of peace with martial exploits. Upon the whole, I believe, there is no where to be found ſo complete a model of an Epic Fable, or Story, as Virgil's Æneid. I ſee no foundation for the opinion, entertained by ſome Critics, that the Æneid is to be conſidered as an Allegorical Poem, which carries a conſtant reference to the character and reign of Auguſtus Cæſar; or, that Virgil's main deſign in compoſing the Æneid, was to reconcile the Romans to the government of that Prince, who is ſuppoſed to be ſhadowed out under the character of Æneas. Virgil, indeed, like the other Poets of that age, takes every opportunity which his ſubject affords him, of paying court to Auguſtus*. But, to imagine that he carried a political plan in his view, through the whole Poem, appears to me no more than a fanciful refinement. He had ſufficient motives, as a Poet, to determine him to the choice of his ſubject, from its being, in itſelf, both great and pleaſing; from its being ſuited to his genius, and its being attended with the peculiar advantages, which I mentioned above, for the full diſplay of poetical talents.

LECT. XLIII.

UNITY of action is perfectly preſerved; as, from beginning to end, one main object is always

* As particularly in that noted paſſage of the 6th book, l. 791.

Hic vir, hic eſt, tibi quem promitti ſæpius audis, &c.

LECT. XLIII.

always kept in view, the ſettlement of Æneas in Italy, by the order of the Gods. As the ſtory comprehends the tranſactions of ſeveral years, part of the tranſactions are very properly thrown into a recital made by the Hero. The Epiſodes are linked with ſufficient connection to the main ſubject; and the Nodus, or Intrigue of the Poem, is, according to the plan of antient machinery, happily formed. The wrath of Juno, who oppoſes herſelf to the Trojan ſettlement in Italy, gives riſe to all the difficulties which obſtruct Æneas's undertaking, and connects the human with the celeſtial operations, throughout the whole work. Hence ariſe the tempeſt which throws Æneas upon the ſhore of Africa; the paſſion of Dido, who endeavours to detain him at Carthage; and the efforts of Turnus, who oppoſes him in war. Till, at laſt, upon a compoſition made with Jupiter, that the Trojan name ſhall be for ever ſunk in the Latin, Juno foregoes her reſentment, and the Hero becomes victorious.

In theſe main points, Virgil has conducted his work with great propriety, and ſhown his art and judgment. But the admiration due to ſo eminent a Poet, muſt not prevent us from remarking ſome other particulars in which he has failed. Firſt, there are ſcarce any characters marked in the Æneid. In this reſpect,

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it is inſipid, when compared to the Iliad, which is full of characters and life. Achates, and Cloanthus, and Gyas, and the reſt of the Trojan heroes, who accompanied Æneas into Italy, are ſo many undiſtinguiſhed figures, who are in no way made known to us, either by any ſentiments which they utter, or any memorable exploits which they perform. Even Æneas himſelf is not a very intereſting Hero. He is deſcribed, indeed, as pious and brave; but his character is not marked with any of thoſe ſtrokes that touch the heart; it is a ſort of cold and tame character; and, throughout his behaviour to Dido, in the fourth book, eſpecially in the ſpeech which he makes after ſhe ſuſpected his intention of leaving her, there appears a certain hardneſs, and want of relenting, which is far from rendering him amiable *. Dido's own character is by much the beſt ſupported, in the whole Æneid. The warmth of her paſſions, the keenneſs of her indignation and reſentment, and the violence of her whole character, exhibit a figure greatly more animated than any other which Virgil has drawn.

Besides this defect of character in the Æneid, the diſtribution and management of the ſubject are, in ſome reſpects, exceptionable.

* Num fletu ingemuit noſtro? Num lumina flexit? Num lachrymas victus dedit? Aut miſeratus amantem eſt? Æn. iv. 368.

LECT. XLIII.

The Æneid, it is true, muſt be conſidered with the indulgence due to a work not thoroughly completed. The ſix laſt books are ſaid not to have received the finiſhing hand of the Author; and for this reaſon, he ordered, by his will, the Æneid to be committed to the flames. But though this may account for incorrectneſs of execution, it does not apologize for a falling off in the ſubject, which ſeems to take place in the latter part of the work. The wars with the Latins are inferior, in point of dignity, to the more intereſting objects which had before been preſented to us, in the deſtruction of Troy, the intrigue with Dido, and the deſcent into Hell. And in thoſe Italian wars, there is, perhaps, a more material fault ſtill, in the conduct of the ſtory. The Reader, as Voltaire has obſerved, is tempted to take part with Turnus againſt Æneas. Turnus, a brave young prince, in love with Lavinia, his near relation, is deſtined for her by general conſent, and highly favoured by her mother. Lavinia herſelf diſcovers no reluctance to the match: when there arrives a ſtranger, a fugitive from a diſtant region, who had never ſeen her, and who founding a claim to an eſtabliſhment in Italy upon oracles and prophecies, embroils the country in war, kills the lover of Lavinia, and proves the occaſion of her mother's death. Such a plan is not fortunately laid, for diſpoſing us to be favourable to the Hero of the Poem; and the defect might have been

LECT. XLIII.

been eaſily remedied, by the Poet's making Æneas, inſtead of diſtreſſing Lavinia, deliver her from the perſecution of ſome rival who was odious to her, and to the whole country.

But, notwithſtanding theſe defects, which it was neceſſary to remark, Virgil poſſeſſes beauties which have juſtly drawn the admiration of ages, and which, to this day, hold the balance in equilibrium between his fame and that of Homer. The principal and diſtinguiſhing excellency of Virgil, and which, in my opinion, he poſſeſſes beyond all Poets, is Tenderneſs. Nature had endowed him with exquiſite ſenſibility; he felt every affecting circumſtance in the ſcenes he deſcribes; and, by a ſingle ſtroke, he knows how to reach the heart. This, in an Epic Poem, is the merit next to ſublimity; and puts it in an Author's power to render his Compoſition extremely intereſting to all Readers.

The chief beauty, of this kind, in the Iliad, is, the interview of Hector with Andromache. But, in the Æneid, there are many ſuch. The ſecond book is one of the greateſt maſterpieces that ever was executed by any hand; and Virgil ſeems to have put forth there the whole ſtrength of his genius, as the ſubject afforded a variety of ſcenes, both of the awful and tender kind. The images of horror, preſented by a city burned and ſacked in the night, are

LECT. XLIII.

are finely mixed with pathetic and affecting incidents. Nothing, in any Poet, is more beautifully deſcribed than the death of old Priam; and the family-pieces of Æneas, Anchiſes, and Creuſa, are as tender as can be conceived. In many paſſages of the Æneid, the ſame pathetic ſpirit ſhines; and they have been always the favourite paſſages in that work. The fourth book, for inſtance, relating the unhappy paſſion and death of Dido, has been always moſt juſtly admired, and abounds with beauties of the higheſt kind. The interview of Æneas with Andromache and Helenus, in the third book; the Epiſodes of Pallas and Evander, of Niſus and Euryalus, of Lauſus and Mezentius, in the Italian wars, are all ſtriking inſtances of the Poet's power of raiſing the tender emotions. For we muſt obſerve, that though the Æneid be an unequal Poem, and, in ſome places, languid, yet there are beauties ſcattered through it all; and not a few, even in the laſt ſix books. The beſt and moſt finiſhed books, upon the whole, are the firſt, the ſecond, the fourth, the ſixth, the ſeventh, the eighth, and the twelfth.

VIRGIL's battles are far inferior to Homer's, in point of fire and ſublimity: but there is one important Epiſode, the Deſcent into Hell, in which he has outdone Homer in the Odyſſey, by many degrees. There is nothing in all antiquity equal, in its kind, to the ſixth book of the

the Æneid. The ſcenery, and the objects, are great and ſtriking; and fill the mind with that ſolemn awe, which was to be expected from a view of the inviſible world. There runs through the whole deſcription, a certain philoſophical ſublime; which Virgil's Platonic Genius, and the enlarged ideas of the Auguſtan Age, enabled him to ſupport with a degree of majeſty, far beyond what the rude ideas of Homer's age ſuffered him to attain. With regard to the ſweetneſs and beauty of Virgil's numbers, throughout his whole works, they are ſo well known, that it were needleſs to enlarge in the praiſe of them.

LECT. XLIII.

Upon the whole, as to the comparative merit of theſe two great princes of Epic Poetry, Homer and Virgil; the former muſt, undoubtedly, be admitted to be the greater Genius; the latter, to be the more correct Writer. Homer was an original in his art, and diſcovers both the beauties, and the defects, which are to be expected in an original Author, compared with thoſe who ſucceed him; more boldneſs, more nature and eaſe, more ſublimity and force; but greater irregularities and negligencies in Compoſition. Virgil has, all along, kept his eye upon Homer; in many places, he has not ſo much imitated, as he has literally tranſlated him. The deſcription of the Storm, for inſtance, in the firſt Æneid, and Æneas's Speech upon that occaſion, are tranſlations

LECT. XLIII.

from the fifth book of the Odyſſey; not to mention almoſt all the ſimilies of Virgil, which are no other than copies of thoſe of Homer. The pre-eminence in invention, therefore, muſt, beyond doubt, be aſcribed to Homer. As to the pre-eminence in judgment, though many Critics are diſpoſed to give it to Virgil, yet, in my opinion, it hangs doubtful. In Homer, we diſcern all the Greek vivacity; in Virgil, all the Roman ſtatelineſs. Homer's imagination is by much the moſt rich and copious; Virgil's the moſt chaſte and correct. The ſtrength of the former lies, in his power of warming the fancy; that of the latter, in his power of touching the heart. Homer's ſtyle is more ſimple and animated; Virgil's, more elegant and uniform. The firſt has, on many occaſions, a ſublimity to which the latter never attains; but the latter, in return, never ſinks below a certain degree of Epic dignity, which cannot ſo clearly be pronounced of the former. Not, however, to detract from the admiration due to both theſe great Poets, moſt of Homer's defects may reaſonably be imputed, not to his genius, but to the manners of the age in which he lived; and for the feeble paſſages of the Æneid, this excuſe ought to be admitted, that the Æneid was left an unfiniſhed work.

LECTURE XLIV.

LUCAN's PHARSALIA—TASSO's JERUSALEM—CAMOENS' LUSIAD—FENELON's TELEMACHUS—VOLTAIRE's HENRIADE—MILTON's PARADISE LOST.

LECT. XLIV.

AFTER Homer and Virgil, the next great Epic Poet of ancient times, who preſents himſelf, is Lucan. He is a Poet who deſerves our attention, on account of a very peculiar mixture of great beauties, with great faults. Though his Pharſalia diſcover too little invention, and be conducted in too hiſtorical a manner, to be accounted a perfectly regular Epic Poem, yet it were the mere ſqueamiſhneſs of Criticiſm, to exclude it from the Epic claſs. The boundaries, as I formerly remarked, are far from being aſcertained by any ſuch preciſe limit, that we muſt refuſe the Epic name to a Poem, which treats of great and heroic adventures, becauſe it is not exactly conformable to the plans of Homer and Virgil. The ſubject of the Pharſalia carries, undoubtedly,

LECT. XLIV.

doubtedly, all the Epic Grandeur and Dignity; neither does it want unity of object, viz. the Triumph of Cæsar over the Roman Liberty. As it stands at present, it is, indeed, brought to no proper close. But either time has deprived us of the last books, or it has been left by the Author an incomplete work.

THOUGH Lucan's subject be abundantly heroic, yet I cannot reckon him happy in the choice of it. It has two defects. The one is, that civil wars, especially when as fierce and cruel as those of the Romans, present too many shocking objects to be fit for Epic Poetry, and give odious and disgusting views of human nature. Gallant and honourable atchievements, furnish a more proper theme for the Epic Muse. But Lucan's Genius, it must be confessed, seems to delight in savage scenes; he dwells upon them too much; and, not content with those which his subject naturally furnished, he goes out of his way to introduce a long Episode of Marius and Sylla's proscriptions, which abounds with all the forms of atrocious cruelty.

THE other defect of Lucan's subject is, its being too near the times in which he lived. This is a circumstance, as I observed in a former Lecture, always unfortunate for a Poet; as it deprives him of the assistance of fiction and machinery; and thereby renders his work

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LECT. XLIV.

leſs ſplendid and amuſing. Lucan has ſubmitted to this diſadvantage of his ſubject; and in doing ſo, has acted with more propriety, than if he had made an unſeaſonable attempt to embelliſh it with machinery; for the fables of the Gods, would have made a very unnatural mixture with the exploits of Cæſar and Pompey; and inſtead of raiſing, would have diminiſhed the dignity of ſuch recent and well-known facts.

With regard to characters, Lucan draws them with ſpirit, and with force. But, though Pompey be his profeſſed Hero, he does not ſucceed in intereſting us much in his favour. Pompey is not made to poſſeſs any high diſtinction, either for magnanimity in ſentiment, or bravery in action; but, on the contrary, is always eclipſed by the ſuperior abilities of Cæſar. Cato is, in truth, Lucan's favourite character; and wherever he introduces him, he appears to riſe above himſelf. Some of the nobleſt, and moſt conſpicuous paſſages in the work, are ſuch as relate to Cato; either ſpeeches put into his mouth, or deſcriptions of his behaviour. His ſpeech, in particular, to Labienus, who urged him to enquire at the Oracle of Jupiter Ammon, concerning the iſſue of the war [book ix. 564], deſerves to be remarked, as equal, for Moral Sublimity, to any thing that is to be found in all antiquity.

LECT. XLIV.

In the conduct of the ſtory, our Author has attached himſelf too much to chronological order. This renders the thread of his narration broken and interrupted, and makes him hurry us too often from place to place. He is too digreſſive alſo; frequently turning aſide from his ſubject, to give us, ſometimes, geographical deſcriptions of a country; ſometimes, philoſophical diſquiſitions concerning natural objects; as, concerning the African Serpents in the ninth book, and the ſources of the Nile in the tenth.

There are, in the Pharſalia, ſeveral very poetical and ſpirited deſcriptions. But the Author's chief ſtrength does not lie, either in Narration or Deſcription. His Narration is often dry and harſh; his Deſcriptions are often over-wrought, and employed too upon diſagreeable objects. His principal merit conſiſts in his ſentiments, which are generally noble and ſtriking, and expreſſed in that glowing and ardent manner, which peculiarly diſtinguiſhes him. Lucan is the moſt philoſophical, and the moſt public-ſpirited Poet, of all antiquity. He was the nephew of the famous Seneca, the Philoſopher; was himſelf a Stoic; and the ſpirit of that Philoſophy breathes throughout his Poem. We muſt obſerve too, that he is the only antient Epic Poet whom the ſubject of his Poem really and deeply

LECT. XLIV.

ly intereſted. Lucan recounted no fiction. He was a Roman, and had felt all the direful effects of the Roman civil wars, and of that ſevere deſpotiſm which ſucceeded the loſs of liberty. His high and bold ſpirit made him enter deeply into this ſubject, and kindle, on many occaſions, into the moſt real warmth. Hence, he abounds in exclamations and apoſtrophes, which are, almoſt always, well-timed, and ſupported with a vivacity and fire that do him no ſmall honour.

But it is the fate of this Poet, that his beauties can never be mentioned, without their ſuggeſting his blemiſhes alſo. As his principal excellency is a lively and glowing genius, which appears, ſometimes, in his deſcriptions, and very often in his ſentiments, his great defect in both is, want of moderation. He carries every thing to an extreme. He knows not where to ſtop. From an effort to aggrandiſe his objects, he becomes tumid and unnatural; and it frequently happens, that where the ſecond line of one of his deſcriptions is ſublime, the third, in which he meant to riſe ſtill higher, is perfectly bombaſt. Lucan lived in an age, when the Schools of the Declaimers had begun to corrupt the Eloquence and Taſte of Rome. He was not free from the infection; and too often, inſtead of ſhowing the genius of the Poet, betrays the ſpirit of the Declaimer.

LECT. XLIV.

On the whole, however, he is an Author of lively and original genius. His ſentiments are ſo high, and his fire, on occaſions, ſo great, as to atone for many of his defects; and paſſages may be produced from him, which are inferior to none in any Poet whatever. The characters, for inſtance, which he draws of Pompey and Cæſar in the firſt Book, are maſterly; and the compariſon of Pompey to the aged decaying oak is highly poetical:

——— totus popularibus auris
Impelli, plauſuque ſui gaudere theatri;
Nec reparare novas vires, multumque priori
Credere fortunæ; ſtat magni nominis umbra,
Qualis, frugifero quercus ſublimis in agro,
Exuvias veteres populi, ſacrataque geſtans
Dona ducum; nec jam validis radicibus hærens,
Pondere fixa ſuo eſt; nudoſque per aëra ramos
Effundens, trunco, non frondibus, efficit umbram,
At quamvis primo nutet caſura ſub Euro,
Et circum ſilvæ firmo ſe robore tollant,
Sola tamen colitur. Sed non in Cæſare tantum
Nomen erat, nec fama ducis; ſed neſcia virtus
Stare loco; ſoluſque pudor non vincere bello;
Acer et indomitus*. ——— L. I. 32.

But

* With gifts and liberal bounty ſought for fame,
And lov'd to hear the vulgar ſhout his name;
In his own theatre rejoiced to ſit,
Amidſt the noiſy praiſes of the pit.
Careleſs of future ills that might betide,
No aid he ſought to prop his falling ſide,
But on his former fortune much rely'd.
Still ſeem'd he to poſſeſs, and fill his place;
But ſtood the ſhadow of what once he was.

So,

LECT. XLIV.

But when we conſider the whole execution of his Poem, we are obliged to pronounce, that his poetical fire was not under the government of either ſound judgment, or correct taſte. His genius had ſtrength, but not tenderneſs; nothing of what may be called amœnity, or ſweetneſs. In his Style, there is abundance of force; but a mixture of harſhneſs, and frequently of obſcurity, occaſioned by his deſire of expreſſing himſelf in a pointed and unuſual manner. Compared with Virgil, he may be allowed to have more fire and higher ſenti-

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So, in the field with Ceres' bounty ſpread,
Uprears ſome antient oak his rev'rend head;
Chaplets, and ſacred gifts his boughs adorn,
And ſpoils of war by mighty heroes worn;
But the firſt vigour of his root now gone,
He ſtands dependant on his weight alone;
All bare his naked branches are diſplay'd,
And with his leafleſs trunk he forms a ſhade.
Yet though the winds his ruin daily threat,
As every blaſt would heave him from his ſeat;
Though thouſand fairer trees the field ſupplies,
That rich in youthful verdure round him riſe,
Fix'd in his antient ſeat, he yields to none,
And wears the honours of the grove alone.
But Cæſar's greatneſs, and his ſtrength was more,
Than paſt renown and antiquated power;
'Twas not the fame of what he once had been,
Or tales in old records or annals ſeen;
But 'twas a valour, reſtleſs, unconfin'd,
Which no ſucceſs could ſate, nor limits bind;
'Twas ſhame, a ſoldier's ſhame, untaught to yield,
That bluſh'd for nothing but an ill-fought field.

Rowe.

ments,

LECT. XLIV.

ments, but in every thing elſe, falls infinitely below him, particularly in purity, elegance, and tenderneſs.

As Statius and Silius Italicus, though they be Poets of the Epic Claſs, are too inconſiderable for particular criticiſm, I proceed next to Taſſo, the moſt diſtinguiſhed Epic Poet in Modern Ages.

His *Jeruſalem Delivered*, was publiſhed in the year 1574. It is a Poem regularly and ſtrictly Epic, in its whole conſtruction; and adorned with all the beauties that belong to that ſpecies of Compoſition. The ſubject is, the Recovery of Jeruſalem from the Infidels, by the united powers of Chriſtendom; which, in itſelf, and more eſpecially according to the ideas of Taſſo's age, was a ſplendid, venerable, and heroic enterpriſe. The oppoſition of the Chriſtians to the Saracens, forms an intereſting contraſt. The ſubject produces none of thoſe fierce and ſhocking ſcenes of civil diſcord, which hurt the mind in Lucan, but exhibits the efforts of zeal and bravery, inſpired by an honourable object. The ſhare which Religion poſſeſſes in the enterpriſe, both tends to render it more auguſt, and opens a natural field for machinery, and ſublime deſcription. The action too lies in a country, and at a period of time, ſufficiently remote to allow an intermixture of fabulous tradition and fiction with true Hiſtory.

In

LECT. XLIV.

In the conduct of the ſtory, Taſſo has ſhown a rich and fertile invention, which, in a Poet, is a capital quality. He is full of events; and thoſe too abundantly various, and diverſified in their kind. He never allows us to be tired by mere war and fighting. He frequently ſhifts the ſcene; and, from camps and battles, tranſports us to more pleaſing objects. Sometimes the ſolemnities of religion; ſometimes the intrigues of love; at other times, the adventures of a journey, or even the incidents of paſtoral life, relieve and entertain the Reader. At the ſame time, the whole work is artfully connected, and while there is much variety in the parts, there is perfect unity in the plan. The recovery of Jeruſalem is the object kept in view through the whole, and with it the Poem cloſes. All the Epiſodes, if we except that of Olindo and Sophronia, in the Second Book, on which I formerly paſſed a cenſure, are ſufficiently related to the main ſubject of the Poem.

The Poem is enlivened with a variety of characters, and thoſe too both clearly marked and well ſupported. Godfrey, the leader of the enterpriſe, prudent, moderate, brave; Tancred, amorous, generous, and gallant, and well contraſted with the fierce and brutal Argantes; Rinaldo (who is properly the Hero of the Poem, and is in part copied after Homer's Achilles), paſſionate and reſentful, ſeduced by the

LECT. XLIV.

the allurements of Armida; but a perſonage, on the whole, of much zeal, honour, and heroiſm. The brave and high-minded Solyman, the tender Erminia, the artful and violent Armida, the maſculine Clorinda; are all of them well drawn and animated figures. In the characteriſtical part, Taſſo is indeed remarkably diſtinguiſhed; he is, in this reſpect, ſuperior to Virgil; and yields to no Poet, except Homer.

He abounds very much with machinery; and in this part of the work his merit is more dubious. Wherever celeſtial beings are made to interpoſe, his machinery is noble. God looking down upon the hoſts, and, on different occaſions, ſending an Angel to check the Pagans, and to rebuke the evil ſpirits, produces a ſublime effect. The deſcription of Hell too, with the appearance and ſpeech of Satan, in the beginning of the fourth book, is extremely ſtriking; and plainly has been imitated by Milton, though he muſt be allowed to have improved upon it. But the devils, the enchanters, and the conjurers, act too great a part throughout Taſſo's Poem; and form a ſort of dark and gloomy machinery, not pleaſing to the imagination. The enchanted wood, on which the Nodus, or Intrigue of the Poem, is made in a great meaſure to depend; the meſſengers ſent in queſt of Rinaldo, in order that he may break the charm; their being conducted by a Hermit

LECT. XLIV.

to a Cave in the centre of the earth; the wonderful voyage which they make to the Fortunate Iſlands; and their recovering Rinaldo from the charms of Armida and voluptuouſneſs; are ſcenes which, though very amuſing, and deſcribed with the higheſt beauty of Poetry, yet muſt be confeſſed to carry the marvellous to a degree of extravagance.

In general, that for which Taſſo is moſt liable to cenſure, is a certain romantic vein, which runs through many of the adventures and incidents of his Poem. The objects which he preſents to us, are always great; but ſometimes, too remote from probability. He retains ſomewhat of the taſte of his age, which was not reclaimed from an extravagant admiration of the ſtories of Knight-Errantry; ſtories, which the wild, but rich and agreeable imagination of Arioſto, had raiſed into freſh reputation. In apology, however, for Taſſo, it may be ſaid, that he is not more marvellous and romantic than either Homer or Virgil. All the difference is, that in the one we find the Romance of Paganiſm, in the other, that of Chivalry.

With all the beauties of deſcription, and of Poetical Style, Taſſo remarkably abounds. Both his deſcriptions, and his Style, are much diverſified, and well-ſuited to each other. In deſcribing

LECT. XLIV.

deſcribing magnificent objects, his Style is firm and majeſtic; when he deſcends to gay and pleaſing ones, ſuch as Erminia's Paſtoral Retreat in the Seventh Book, and the Arts and Beauty of Armida in the Fourth Book, it is ſoft and inſinuating. Both thoſe deſcriptions, which I have mentioned, are exquiſite in their kind. His battles are animated, and very properly varied in the incidents; inferior however to Homer's, in point of ſpirit and fire.

In his ſentiments, Taſſo is not ſo happy as in his deſcriptions. It is indeed rather by actions, characters, and deſcriptions, that he intereſts us, than by the ſentimental part of the work. He is far inferior to Virgil in tenderneſs. When he aims at being pathetic and ſentimental in his ſpeeches, he is apt to become artificial and ſtrained.

With regard to points and conceits, with which he has often been reproached, the cenſure has been carried too far. Affectation is by no means the general character of Taſſo's manner, which, upon the whole, is maſculine, ſtrong, and correct. On ſome occaſions, indeed, eſpecially, as I juſt now obſerved, when he ſeeks to be tender, he degenerates into forced and unnatural ideas; but theſe are far from being ſo frequent or common as has been ſuppoſed. Threeſcore or fourſcore lines retrenched from

the Poem, would fully clear it, I am perſuaded, of all ſuch exceptionable paſſages. LECT. XLIV.

With Boileau, Dacier, and the other French Critics of the laſt age, the humour prevailed of decrying Taſſo; and paſſed from them to ſome of the Engliſh Writers. But one would be apt to imagine, they were not much acquainted with Taſſo; or at leaſt they muſt have read him, under the influence of ſtrong prejudices. For to me it appears clear, that the Jeruſalem is, in rank and dignity, the third regular Epic Poem in the World; and comes next to the Iliad and Æneid. Taſſo may be juſtly held inferior to Homer, in ſimplicity and in fire; to Virgil, in tenderneſs; to Milton, in daring ſublimity of genius; but to no other he yields in any poetical talents; and for fertility of invention, variety of incidents, expreſſion of characters, richneſs of deſcription, and beauty of Style, I know no Poet, except the three juſt named, that can be compared to him.

Ariosto, the great rival of Taſſo in Italian Poetry, cannot, with any propriety, be claſſed among the Epic Writers. The fundamental rule of Epic Compoſition is, to recount a heroic enterpriſe, and to form it into a regular ſtory. Though there is a ſort of unity and connection in the plan of Orlando Furioſo, yet, inſtead of rendering this apparent to the Reader,

LECT. XLIV.

Reader, it ſeems to have been the Author's intention to keep it out of view, by the deſultory manner in which the Poem is carried on, and the perpetual interruptions of the ſeveral ſtories before they are finiſhed. Arioſto appears to have deſpiſed all regularity of plan, and to have choſen to give looſe reins to a copious and rich, but extravagant fancy. At the ſame time, there is ſo much Epic matter in the Orlando Furioſo, that it would be improper to paſs it by without ſome notice. It unites indeed all ſorts of Poetry; ſometimes comic and ſatiric; ſometimes light and licentious; at other times, highly heroic, deſcriptive, and tender. Whatever ſtrain the Poet aſſumes, he excels in it. He is always maſter of his ſubject; ſeems to play himſelf with it; and leaves us ſometimes at a loſs to know whether he be ſerious or in jeſt. He is ſeldom dramatic; ſometimes, but not often, ſentimental; but in narration and deſcription, perhaps no Poet ever went beyond him. He makes every ſcene which he deſcribes, and every event which he relates, paſs before our eyes; and in his ſelection of circumſtances, is eminently pictureſque. His Style is much varied, always ſuited to the ſubject, and adorned with a remarkably ſmooth and melodious Verſification.

As the Italians make their boaſt of Taſſo, ſo do the Portugueſe of Camoens; who was near-

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ly cotemporary with Taſſo, but whoſe Poem was publiſhed before the Jeruſalem. The ſubject of it, is the firſt diſcovery of the Eaſt-Indies by Vaſco de Gama; an enterpriſe ſplendid in its nature, and extremely intereſting to the countrymen of Camoens, as it laid the foundation of their future wealth and conſideration in Europe. The Poem opens with Vaſco and his fleet appearing on the ocean, between the Iſland Madagaſcar, and the Coaſt of Æthiopia. After various attempts to land on that coaſt, they are at laſt hoſpitably received in the kingdom of Melinda. Vaſco, at the deſire of the King, gives him an account of Europe, recites a poetical hiſtory of Portugal, and relates all the adventures of the voyage, which had preceded the opening of the Poem. This recital takes up three Cantos, or Books. It is well imagined; contains a great many poetical beauties; and has no defect, except that Vaſco makes an unſeaſonable diſplay of learning to the African Prince, in frequent alluſions to the Greek and Roman Hiſtories. Vaſco and his countrymen afterwards ſet forth to purſue their voyage. The ſtorms and diſtreſſes which they encounter; their arrival at Calecut on the Malabar coaſt; their reception and adventures in that country, and at laſt their return homewards, fill up the reſt of the Poem.

LECT. XLIV.

THE whole work is conducted according to the Epic Plan. Both the ſubject and the in-

LECT. XLIV.

cidents are magnificent; and, joined with ſome wildneſs and irregularity, there appear in the execution much poetic ſpirit, ſtrong fancy, and bold deſcription; as far as I can judge from tranſlations, without any knowledge of the original. There is no attempt towards painting characters in the Poem; Vaſco is the hero, and the only perſonage indeed that makes any figure.

THE machinery of the Luſiad is perfectly extravagant; not only is it formed of a ſingular mixture of Chriſtian ideas, and Pagan mythology; but it is ſo conducted, that the Pagan Gods appear to be the true Deities, and Chriſt and the Bleſſed Virgin, to be ſubordinate agents. One great ſcope of the Portugueſe expedition, our Author informs us, is to propagate the Chriſtian faith, and to extirpate Mahometaniſm. In this religious undertaking, the great protector of the Portugueſe is Venus, and their great adverſary is Bacchus, whoſe diſpleaſure is excited, by Vaſco's attempting to rival his fame in the Indies. Councils of the Gods are held, in which Jupiter is introduced, as foretelling the downfal of Mahometaniſm, and the propagation of the Goſpel. Vaſco, in great diſtreſs from a ſtorm, prays moſt ſeriouſly to God; implores the aid of Chriſt and the Virgin, and begs for ſuch aſſiſtance as was given to the Iſraelites, when they were paſſing through the Red Sea, and to the Apoſtle Paul, when

when he was in hazard of ſhipwreck. In return to this prayer, Venus appears, who diſcerning the ſtorm to be the work of Bacchus, complains to Jupiter, and procures the winds to be calmed. Such ſtrange and prepoſterous machinery, ſhows how much Authors have been miſled by the abſurd opinion, that there could be no Epic Poetry without the Gods of Homer. Towards the end of the work, indeed, the Author gives us an awkward ſalvo for his whole Mythology; making the Goddeſs Thetis inform Vaſco, that ſhe, and the reſt of the Heathen Deities, are no more than names to deſcribe the operations of Providence.

THERE is, however, ſome fine machinery, of a different kind, in the Luſiad. The genius of the river Ganges appearing to Emanuel King of Portugal, in a dream, inviting that Prince to diſcover his ſecret ſprings, and acquainting him, that he was the deſtined monarch for whom the treaſures of the Eaſt were reſerved, is a happy idea. But the nobleſt conception of this ſort, is in the Fifth Canto, where Vaſco is recounting to the King of Melinda, all the wonders which he met with in his navigation. He tells him, that when the fleet arrived at the Cape of Good Hope, which never before had been doubled by any navigator, there appeared to them on a ſudden, a huge and monſtrous

SECT. XLIV.

phantom riſing out of the ſea, in the midſt of tempeſts and thunders, with a head that reached the clouds, and a countenance that filled them with terror. This was the genius, or guardian, of that hitherto unknown ocean. It ſpoke to them with a voice like thunder; menaced them, for invading thoſe ſeas which he had ſo long poſſeſſed undiſturbed; and for daring to explore thoſe ſecrets of the deep, which never had been revealed to the eye of mortals; required them to proceed no farther; if they ſhould proceed, foretold all the ſucceſſive calamities that were to befal them; and then, with a mighty noiſe, diſappeared. This is one of the moſt ſolemn and ſtriking pieces of machinery that ever was employed; and is ſufficient to ſhow that Camoens is a Poet, though of an irregular, yet of a bold and a lofty imagination*.

In reviewing the Epic Poets, it were unjuſt to make no mention of the amiable Author of the Adventures of Telemachus. His work, though not compoſed in Verſe, is juſtly entitled to be held a Poem. The meaſured poetical Proſe, in which it is written, is remarkably

* I have made no mention of the Araucana, an Epic Poem, in Spaniſh, compoſed by Alonzo d'Ercilla, becauſe I am unacquainted with the original language, and have not ſeen any tranſlation of it. A full account of it is given by Mr. Hayley, in the Notes upon his Eſſay on Epic Poetry.

harmonious;

harmonious; and gives the Style nearly as much elevation as the French language is capable of ſupporting, even in regular Verſe.

THE plan of the work is, in general, well contrived; and is deficient neither in Epic grandeur, nor unity of object. The Author has entered with much felicity into the ſpirit and ideas of the Antient Poets, particularly into the Antient Mythology, which retains more dignity, and makes a better figure in his hands, than in thoſe of any other Modern Poet. His deſcriptions are rich and beautiful; eſpecially of the ſofter and calmer ſcenes, for which the genius of Fenelon was beſt ſuited; ſuch as the incidents of paſtoral life, the pleaſures of virtue, or a country flouriſhing in peace. There is an inimitable ſweetneſs and tenderneſs in ſeveral of the pictures of this kind, which he has given.

THE beſt executed part of the work, is the firſt Six Books, in which Telemachus recounts his adventures to Calypſo. The narration, throughout them, is lively and intereſting. Afterwards, eſpecially in the laſt twelve books, it becomes more tedious and languid; and in the warlike adventures which are attempted, there is a great defect of vigour. The chief objection againſt this work being claſſed with Epic Poems, ariſes from the minute details of

LECT. XLIV.

virtuous policy, into which the Author in ſome places enters; and from the diſcourſes and inſtructions of Mentor, which recur upon us too often, and too much in the ſtrain of common-place morality. Though theſe were well ſuited to the main deſign of the Author, which was to form the mind of a young Prince, yet they ſeem not congruous to the nature of Epic Poetry; the object of which is to improve us by means of actions, characters, and ſentiments, rather than by delivering profeſſed and formal inſtruction.

SEVERAL of the Epic Poets have deſcribed a deſcent into Hell; and in the proſpects they have given us of the inviſible world, we may obſerve the gradual refinement of men's notions concerning a ſtate of future rewards and puniſhments. The deſcent of Ulyſſes into Hell, in Homer's Odyſſey, preſents to us a very indiſtinct and dreary ſort of object. The ſcene is laid in the country of the Cimmerians, which is always covered with clouds and darkneſs, at the extremity of the ocean. When the ſpirits of the dead begin to appear, we ſcarcely know whether Ulyſſes is above ground, or below it. None of the ghoſts, even of the heroes, appear ſatisfied with their condition in the other world; and when Ulyſſes endeavours to comfort Achilles, by reminding him of the illuſtrious figure which he muſt make in thoſe regions,

regions, Achilles roundly tells him, that all ſuch ſpeeches are idle; for, he would rather be a day-labourer on earth, than have the command of all the dead.

In the Sixth Book of the Æneid, we diſcern a much greater refinement of ideas, correſponding to the progreſs which the world had then made in philoſophy. The objects there delineated, are both more clear and diſtinct, and more grand and awful. The ſeparate manſions of good and of bad ſpirits, with the puniſhments of the one, and the employments and happineſs of the other, are finely deſcribed; and in conſiſtency with the moſt pure morality. But the viſit which Fenelon makes Telemachus pay to the ſhades, is much more philoſophical ſtill than Virgil's. He employs the ſame fables and the ſame mythology; but we find the antient mythology refined by the knowledge of the true religion, and adorned with that beautiful enthuſiaſm, for which Fenelon was ſo diſtinguiſhed. His account of the happineſs of the juſt is an excellent deſcription in the myſtic ſtrain; and very expreſſive of the genius and ſpirit of the Author.

Voltaire has given us, in his Henriade, a regular Epic Poem, in French verſe. In every performance of that celebrated Writer, we may expect to find marks of genius; and, accordingly,

LECT. XLIV.

ingly, that work diſcovers, in ſeveral places, that boldneſs in the conceptions, and that livelineſs and felicity in the expreſſion, for which the Author is ſo remarkably diſtinguiſhed. Several of the compariſons, in particular, which occur in it, are both new and happy. But conſidered upon the whole, I cannot eſteem it one of his chief productions; and am of opinion, that he has ſucceeded infinitely better in Tragic, than in Epic Compoſition. French Verſification ſeems ill adapted to Epic Poetry. Beſides it being always fettered by rhyme, the language never aſſumes a ſufficient degree of elevation or majeſty; and appears to be more capable of expreſſing the tender in Tragedy, than of ſupporting the ſublime in Epic. Hence a feebleneſs, and ſometimes a proſaic flatneſs, in the Style of the Henriade; and whether from this, or from ſome other cauſe, the Poem often languiſhes. It does not ſeize the imagination; nor intereſt and carry the Reader along, with that ardour which ought to be inſpired by a ſublime and ſpirited Epic Poem.

THE ſubject of the Henriade, is the triumph of Henry the Fourth over the arms of the League. The action of the Poem, properly includes only the Siege of Paris. It is in action perfectly Epic in its nature; great, intereſting, and conducted with a ſufficient regard

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to unity, and all the other critical rules. But it is liable to both the defects which I before remarked in Lucan's Pharsalia. It is founded wholly on civil wars; and presents to us those odious and detestable objects of massacres and assassinations, which throw a gloom over the Poem. It is also, like Lucan's, of too recent a date, and comes too much within the bounds of well-known history. To remedy this last defect, and to remove the appearance of being a mere historian, Voltaire has chosen to mix fiction with truth. The Poem, for instance, opens with a voyage of Henry's to England, and an interview between him and Queen Elizabeth; though every one knows that Henry never was in England, and that these two illustrious personages never met. In facts of such public notoriety, a fiction like this shocks the Reader, and forms an unnatural and ill-sorted mixture with historical truth. The Episode was contrived, in order to give Henry an opportunity of recounting the former transactions of the civil wars, in imitation of the recital which Æneas makes to Dido in the Æneid. But the imitation was injudicious. Æneas might, with propriety, relate to Dido, transactions of which she was either entirely ignorant, or had acquired only an imperfect knowledge by flying reports. But Queen Elizabeth could not but be supposed to be perfectly apprised of all the facts, which the Poet makes Henry recite to her.

LECT. XLIV.

In order to embelliſh his ſubject, Voltaire has choſen to employ a great deal of machinery. But here alſo, I am obliged to cenſure his conduct; for the machinery, which he chiefly employs, is of the worſt kind, and the leaſt ſuited to an Epic Poem, that of allegorical beings. Diſcord, Cunning, and Love, appear as perſonages, mix with the human actors, and make a conſiderable figure in the intrigue of the Poem. This is contrary to every rule of rational criticiſm. Ghoſts, Angels, and Devils have popular belief on their ſide, and may be conceived as exiſting. But every one knows, that allegorical beings are no more than repreſentations of human diſpoſitions and paſſions. They may be employed like other Perſonifications and Figures of Speech; or in a Poem, that is wholly allegorical, they may occupy the chief place. They are there in their native and proper region; but in a Poem which relates to human tranſactions, as I had occaſion before to remark, when ſuch beings are deſcribed as acting along with men, the imagination is confounded; it is divided between phantaſms and realities, and knows not on what to reſt.

In juſtice, however, to our Author, I muſt obſerve, that the machinery of St. Louis, which he alſo employs, is of a better kind, and poſſeſſes real dignity. The fineſt paſſage in the Henriade, indeed one of the fineſt that occurs

occurs in any Poem, is the proſpect of the inviſible world, which St. Louis gives to Henry in a dream, in the Seventh Canto. Death bringing the ſouls of the departed in ſucceſſion before God; their aſtoniſhment when arriving from all different countries and religious ſects, they are brought into the divine preſence; when they find their ſuperſtitions to be falſe, and have the truth unveiled to them; the palace of the Deſtinies opened to Henry, and the proſpect of his ſucceſſors which is there given him; are ſtriking and magnificent objects, and do honour to the genius of Voltaire.

Though ſome of the Epiſodes in this Poem are properly extended, yet the narration is, on the whole, too general; the events are too much crowded, and ſuperficially related; which is, doubtleſs, one cauſe of the Poem making a faint impreſſion. The ſtrain of ſentiment which runs through it, is high and noble. Religion appears, on every occaſion, with great and proper luſtre; and the Author breathes that ſpirit of humanity and toleration, which is conſpicuous in all his works.

Milton, of whom it remains now to ſpeak, has chalked out for himſelf a new, and very extraordinary road, in Poetry. As ſoon as we open his Paradiſe Loſt, we find ourſelves introduced

LECT. XLIV.

troduced all at once into an inviſible world, and ſurrounded with celeſtial and infernal beings. Angels and Devils, are not the machinery, but principal actors, in the Poem; and what, in any other compoſition, would be the marvellous, is here only the natural courſe of events. A ſubject ſo remote from the affairs of this world, may furniſh ground to thoſe who think ſuch diſcuſſions material, to bring it into doubt, whether Paradiſe Loſt can properly be claſſed among Epic Poems. By whatever name it is to be called, it is, undoubtedly, one of the higheſt efforts of poetical genius; and in one great characteriſtic of the Epic Poem, Majeſty and Sublimity, it is fully equal to any that bear that name.

How far the Author was altogether happy in the choice of his ſubject, may be queſtioned. It has led him into very difficult ground. Had he taken a ſubject that was more human, and leſs theological; that was more connected with the occurrences of life, and afforded a greater diſplay of the characters and paſſions of men, his Poem would, perhaps, have, to the bulk of Readers, been more pleaſing and attractive. But the ſubject which he has choſen, ſuited the daring ſublimity of his genius *. It is a ſubject for which Milton alone was

* "He ſeems to have been well acquainted with his "own genius, and to know what it was that nature had "beſtowed

LECT. XLIV.

was fitted; and in the conduct of it, he has ſhown a ſtretch both of imagination and invention, which is perfectly wonderful. It is aſtoniſhing how, from the few hints given us in the Sacred Scriptures, he was able to raiſe ſo complete and regular a ſtructure; and to fill his Poem with ſuch a variety of incidents. Dry and harſh paſſages ſometimes occur. The Author appears, upon ſome occaſions, a Metaphyſician and a Divine, rather than a Poet. But the general tenor of his work is intereſting; he ſeizes and fixes the imagination; engages, elevates, and affects us as we proceed; which is always a ſure teſt of merit in an Epic Compoſition. The artful change of his objects; the ſcene laid now in Earth, now in Hell, and now in Heaven, affords a ſufficient diverſity; while unity of plan is, at the ſame time, perfectly ſupported. We have ſtill life, and calm ſcenes, in the employments of Adam and Eve in Paradiſe; and we have buſy ſcenes, and great actions, in the enterpriſe of Satan, and the wars of the Angels. The innocence, purity, and amiableneſs of our firſt parents,

"beſtowed upon him more bountifully than upon others; "the power of diſplaying the vaſt, illuminating the ſplen- "did, enforcing the awful, darkening the gloomy, and ag- "gravating the dreadful. He therefore choſe a ſubject, on "which too much could not be ſaid; on which he might "tire his fancy, without the cenſure of extravagance."

Dr. JOHNSON's Life of Milton.

oppoſed

LECT. XLIV.

oppoſed to the pride and ambition of Satan, furniſhes a happy contraſt, that reigns throughout the whole Poem; only the Concluſion, as I before obſerved, is too tragic for Epic Poetry.

The nature of the ſubject did not admit any great diſplay of characters; but ſuch as could be introduced, are ſupported with much propriety. Satan, in particular, makes a ſtriking figure, and is, indeed, the beſt drawn character in the Poem. Milton has not deſcribed him, ſuch as we ſuppoſe an infernal ſpirit to be. He has, more ſuitably to his own purpoſe, given him a human, that is, a mixed character, not altogether void of ſome good qualities. He is brave and faithful to his troops. In the midſt of his impiety, he is not without remorſe. He is even touched with pity for our firſt parents; and juſtifies himſelf in his deſign againſt them, from the neceſſity of his ſituation. He is actuated by ambition and reſentment, rather than by pure malice. In ſhort, Milton's Satan is no worſe than many a conſpirator or factious chief, that makes a figure in hiſtory. The different characters of Beelzebub, Moloch, Belial, are exceedingly well painted in thoſe eloquent ſpeeches which they make, in the Second Book. The good Angels, though always deſcribed with dignity and propriety, have more uniformity than the Infernal Spirits

in their appearance; though among them, too, the dignity of Michael, the mild condeſcenſion of Raphael, and the tried fidelity of Abdiel, form proper characteriſtical diſtinctions. The attempt to deſcribe God Almighty himſelf, and to recount dialogues between the Father and the Son, was too bold and arduous, and is that wherein our Poet, as was to have been expected, has been moſt unſucceſsful. With regard to his human characters; the innocence of our firſt parents, and their love, are finely and delicately painted. In ſome of his ſpeeches to Raphael and to Eve, Adam is, perhaps, too knowing and refined for his ſituation. Eve is more diſtinctly characteriſed. Her gentleneſs, modeſty, and frailty, mark very expreſſively a female character.

MILTON's great and diſtinguiſhing excellence is, his ſublimity. In this, perhaps, he excels Homer; as there is no doubt of his leaving Virgil, and every other Poet, far behind him. Almoſt the whole of the Firſt and Second Books of Paradiſe Loſt are continued inſtances of the ſublime. The proſpect of Hell and of the fallen Hoſt, the appearance and behaviour of Satan, the conſultation of the infernal Chiefs, and Satan's flight through Chaos to the borders of this world, diſcover the moſt lofty ideas that ever entered into the conception of any Poet. In the Sixth Book alſo,

LECT. XLIV.

alſo, there is much grandeur, particularly in the appearance of the Meſſiah; though ſome parts of that book are cenſurable; and the witticiſms of the Devils upon the effect of their artillery, form an intolerable blemiſh. Milton's ſublimity is of a different kind from that of Homer. Homer's is generally accompanied with fire and impetuoſity; Milton's poſſeſſes more of a calm and amazing grandeur. Homer warms and hurries us along; Milton fixes us in a ſtate of aſtoniſhment and elevation. Homer's ſublimity appears moſt in the deſcription of actions; Milton's, in that of wonderful and ſtupendous objects.

But though Milton is moſt diſtinguiſhed for his ſublimity, yet there is alſo much of the beautiful, the tender, and the pleaſing, in many parts of his work. When the ſcene is laid in Paradiſe, the imagery is always of the moſt gay and ſmiling kind. His deſcriptions ſhow an uncommonly fertile imagination; and in his ſimilies, he is, for the moſt part, remarkably happy. They are ſeldom improperly introduced; ſeldom either low, or trite. They generally preſent to us images taken from the ſublime or the beautiful claſs of objects; if they have any faults, it is their alluding too frequently to matters of learning, and to fables of antiquity. In the latter part of Paradiſe Loſt, there muſt be confeſſed to be a falling off. With the fall of our firſt parents,

Milton's

LECT. XLIV.

Milton's genius ſeems to decline. Beauties, however, there are, in the concluding Books, of the tragic kind. The remorſe and contrition of the guilty pair, and their lamentations over Paradiſe, when they are obliged to leave it, are very moving. The laſt Epiſode of the Angel's ſhowing Adam the fate of his poſterity, is happily imagined; but, in many places, the execution is languid.

Milton's language and verſification have high merit. His Style is full of majeſty, and wonderfully adapted to his ſubject. His blank verſe is harmonious and diverſified, and affords the moſt complete example of the elevation, which our language is capable of attaining by the force of numbers. It does not flow like the French verſe, in tame, regular, uniform melody, which ſoon tires the ear; but is ſometimes ſmooth and flowing, ſometimes rough; varied in its cadence, and intermixed with diſcords, ſo as to ſuit the ſtrength and freedom of Epic Compoſition. Neglected and proſaic lines, indeed, we ſometimes meet with; but, in a work ſo long, and in the main ſo harmonious, theſe may be forgiven.

On the whole; Paradiſe Loſt is a Poem that abounds with beauties of every kind, and that juſtly entitles its Author to a degree of fame not inferior to any Poet; though it muſt

LECT. XLIV.

be alſo admitted to have many inequalities. It is the lot of almoſt every high and daring genius, not to be uniform and correct. Milton is too frequently theological and metaphyſical; ſometimes harſh in his language; often too technical in his words, and affectedly oſtentatious of his learning. Many of his faults muſt be attributed to the pedantry of the age in which he lived. He diſcovers a vigour, a graſp of genius equal to every thing that is great; if at ſome times he falls much below himſelf, at other times he riſes above every Poet, of the antient or modern world.

LECTURE XLV.

DRAMATIC POETRY—TRAGEDY.

LECT. XLV.

DRAMATIC Poetry has, among all civilized nations, been conſidered as a rational and uſeful entertainment. and judged worthy of careful and ſerious diſcuſſion. According as it is employed upon the light and the gay, or upon the grave and affecting incidents of human life, it divides itſelf into the two forms, of Comedy or Tragedy. But as great and ſerious objects command more attention than little and ludicrous ones; as the fall of a Hero intereſts the public more than the marriage of a private perſon; Tragedy has been always held a more dignified entertainment than Comedy. The one reſts upon the high paſſions, the virtues, crimes, and ſufferings of mankind; the other on their humours, follies, and pleaſures. Terror and pity are the great inſtruments of the former; ridicule is the ſole inſtrument of the latter. Tra-

LECT. XLV.

gedy ſhall therefore be the object of our fulleſt diſcuſſion. This and the following Lecture ſhall be employed on it; after which I ſhall treat of what is peculiar to Comedy.

TRAGEDY, conſidered as an exhibition of the characters and behaviour of men, in ſome of the moſt trying and critical ſituations of life, is a noble idea of Poetry. It is a direct imitation of human manners and actions. For it does not, like the Epic Poem, exhibit characters by the narration and deſcription of the Poet; but the Poet diſappears; and the perſonages themſelves are ſet before us, acting and ſpeaking what is ſuitable to their characters. Hence, no kind of writing is ſo great a trial of the Author's profound knowledge of the human heart. No kind of writing has ſo much power, when happily executed, to raiſe the ſtrongeſt emotions. It is, or ought to be, a mirror in which we behold ourſelves, and the evils to which we are expoſed; a faithful copy of the human paſſions, with all their direful effects, when they are ſuffered to become extravagant.

As Tragedy is a high and diſtinguiſhed ſpecies of Compoſition, ſo alſo, in its general ſtrain and ſpirit, it is favourable to virtue. Such power hath virtue happily over the human mind, by the wiſe and gracious conſtitution

LECT. XLV.

tion of our nature, that as admiration cannot be raiſed in Epic Poetry, ſo neither in Tragic Poetry can our paſſions be ſtrongly moved, unleſs virtuous emotions be awakened within us. Every Poet finds, that it is impoſſible to intereſt us in any character, without repreſenting that character as worthy and honourable, though it may not be perfect; and that the great ſecret for raiſing indignation, is to paint the perſon who is to be the object of it, in the colours of vice and depravity. He may, indeed, nay, he muſt, repreſent the virtuous as ſometimes unfortunate, becauſe this is often the caſe in real life; but he will always ſtudy to engage our hearts in their behalf; and though they may be deſcribed as unproſperous, yet there is no inſtance of a Tragic Poet repreſenting vice as fully triumphant, and happy, in the cataſtrophe of the Piece. Even when bad men ſucceed in their deſigns, puniſhment is made always to attend them; and miſery of one kind or other, is ſhown to be unavoidably connected with guilt. Love and admiration of virtuous characters, compaſſion for the injured and the diſtreſſed, and indignation againſt the authors of their ſufferings, are the ſentiments moſt generally excited by Tragedy. And, therefore, though Dramatic Writers may ſometimes, like other Writers, be guilty of improprieties, though they may fail of placing virtue preciſely in the due point of

LECT. XLV.

light, yet no reaſonable perſon can deny Tragedy to be a moral ſpecies of compoſition. Taking Tragedies complexly, I am fully perſuaded, that the impreſſions left by them upon the mind, are, on the whole, favourable to virtue and good diſpoſitions. And, therefore, the zeal which ſome pious men have ſhown againſt the entertainments of the Theatre, muſt reſt only upon the abuſe of Comedy; which, indeed, has frequently been ſo great as to juſtify very ſevere cenſures againſt it.

The account which Ariſtotle gives of the deſign of Tragedy is, that it is intended to purge our paſſions by means of pity and terror. This is ſomewhat obſcure. Various ſenſes have been put upon his words, and much altercation has followed among his commentators. Without entering into any controverſy upon this head, the intention of Tragedy may, I think, be more ſhortly and clearly defined, To improve our virtuous ſenſibility. If an Author intereſts us in behalf of virtue, forms us to compaſſion for the diſtreſſed, inſpires us with proper ſentiments, on beholding the viciſſitudes of life, and, by means of the concern which he raiſes for the misfortunes of others, leads us to guard againſt errors in our own conduct, he accompliſhes all the moral purpoſes of Tragedy.

LECT. XLV.

In order to this end, the firſt requiſite is, that he chooſe ſome moving and intereſting ſtory, and that he conduct it in a natural and probable manner. For we muſt obſerve, that the natural and the probable muſt always be the baſis of Tragedy; and are infinitely more important there, than in Epic Poetry. The object of the Epic Poet, is to excite our admiration by the recital of heroic adventures; and a much ſlighter degree of probability is required when admiration is concerned, than when the tender paſſions are intended to be moved. The imagination, in the former caſe, is exalted, accommodates itſelf to the Poet's idea, and can admit the marvellous, without being ſhocked. But Tragedy demands a ſtricter imitation of the life and actions of men. For the end which it purſues is, not ſo much to elevate the imagination, as to affect the heart; and the heart always judges more nicely than the imagination, of what is probable. Paſſion can be raiſed, only by making the impreſſions of nature, and of truth, upon the mind. By introducing, therefore, any wild or romantic circumſtances into his Story, the Poet never fails to check paſſion in its growth, and, of courſe, diſappoints the main effect of Tragedy.

This principle, which is founded on the cleareſt reaſon, excludes from Tragedy all

LECT. XLV.

machinery, or fabulous intervention of the Gods. Ghoſts have, indeed, maintained their place; as being ſtrongly founded on popular belief, and peculiarly ſuited to heighten the terror of Tragic Scenes. But all unravellings of the Plot, which turn upon the interpoſition of Deities, ſuch as Euripides employs in ſeveral of his plays, are much to be condemned; both as clumſy and inartificial, and as deſtroying the probability of the Story. This mixture of machinery with the Tragic Action, is undoubtedly a blemiſh in the Antient Theatre.

In order to promote that impreſſion of probability which is ſo neceſſary to the ſucceſs of Tragedy, ſome Critics have required, that the ſubject ſhould never be a pure fiction invented by the Poet, but built on real hiſtory, or known facts. Such, indeed, were generally, if not always, the ſubjects of the Greek Tragedians. But I cannot hold this to be a matter of any great conſequence. It is proved by experience, that a fictitious tale, if properly conducted, will melt the heart as much as any real hiſtory. In order to our being moved, it is not neceſſary, that the events related did actually happen, provided they be ſuch as might eaſily have happened in the ordinary courſe of nature. Even when Tragedy borrows its materials from Hiſtory, it mixes many a fic-

LECT. XLV.

a fictitious circumſtance. The greateſt part of Readers neither know, nor enquire, what is fabulous or what is hiſtorical, in the ſubject. They attend only to what is probable, and are touched by events which reſemble nature. Accordingly, ſome of the moſt pathetic Tragedies are entirely fictitious in the ſubject; ſuch as Voltaire's Zaire and Alzire, the Orphan, Douglas, the Fair Penitent, and ſeveral others.

WHETHER the ſubject be of the real or feigned kind, that on which moſt depends for rendering the incidents in a Tragedy probable, and, by means of their probability affecting, is the conduct, or management of the Story, and the connexion of its ſeveral parts. To regulate this conduct, Critics have laid down the famous rule of the three Unities; the importance of which, it will be neceſſary to diſcuſs. But, in order to do this with more advantage, it will be neceſſary, that we firſt look backwards, and trace the riſe and origin of Tragedy, which will give light to ſeveral things relating to the ſubject.

TRAGEDY, like other arts, was, in its beginnings, rude and imperfect. Among the Greeks, from whom our Dramatic Entertainments are derived, the origin of Tragedy was no other than the Song which was wont to be ſung

LECT. XLV.

ſung at the feſtival of Bacchus. A goat was the ſacrifice offered to that God; after the ſacrifice, the Prieſts, with the company that joined them, ſung hymns in honour of Bacchus; and from the name of the victim, τραγος a Goat, joined with ωδη a Song, undoubtedly aroſe the word, Tragedy.

THESE Hymns, or Lyric Poems, were ſung ſometimes by the whole company, ſometimes by ſeparate bands, anſwering alternately to each other; making what we call a Chorus, with its Strophes and Antiſtrophes. In order to throw ſome variety into this entertainment, and to relieve the Singers, it was thought proper to introduce a perſon who, between the Songs, ſhould make a recitation in Verſe. Theſpis, who lived about 536 years before the Chriſtian æra, made this innovation; and, as it was reliſhed, Æſchylus, who came 50 years after him, and who is properly the father of Tragedy, went a ſtep farther, introduced a Dialogue between two perſons, or actors, in which he contrived to interweave ſome intereſting Story, and brought his actors on a Stage, adorned with proper ſcenery and decorations. All that theſe actors recited, was called Epiſode, or additional Song; and the Songs of the Chorus were made to relate no longer to Bacchus, their original ſubject, but to the Story in which the Actors were concerned. This began

began to give the drama a regular form, which was ſoon after brought to perfection by Sophocles and Euripides. It is remarkable, in how ſhort a ſpace of time Tragedy grew up among the Greeks, from the rudeſt beginnings to its moſt perfect ſtate. For Sophocles, the greateſt and moſt correct of all the Tragic Poets, flouriſhed only 22 years after Æſchylus, and was little more than 70 years poſterior to Theſpis.

LECT. XLV.

FROM the account which I have now given, it appears, that the Chorus was the baſis or foundation of the antient Tragedy. It was not an ornament added to it; or a contrivance deſigned to render it more perfect; but, in truth, the Dramatic Dialogue was an addition to the Chorus, which was the original entertainment. In proceſs of time, the Chorus, from being the principal, became only the acceſſory in Tragedy; till at laſt, in Modern Tragedy, it has diſappeared altogether; which forms the chief diſtinction between the Antient and the Modern Stage.

THIS has given riſe to a queſtion, much agitated between the partizans of the Antients and the Moderns, whether the Drama has gained, or has ſuffered, by the abolition of the Chorus. It muſt be admitted, that the Chorus tended to render Tragedy both more magnificent and more inſtructive and moral. It was always the

LECT. XLV.

moſt ſublime and poetical part of the work; and being carried on by ſinging, and accompanied with Muſic, it muſt, no doubt, have diverſified the Entertainment greatly, and added to its ſplendour. The Chorus, at the ſame time, conveyed conſtant leſſons of Virtue. It was compoſed of ſuch perſons as might moſt naturally be ſuppoſed preſent on the occaſion; inhabitants of the place where the ſcene was laid, often the companions of ſome of the principal actors, and, therefore, in ſome degree intereſted in the iſſue of the action. This company, which, in the days of Sophocles, was reſtricted to the number of fifteen perſons, was conſtantly on the Stage, during the whole performance, mingled in diſcourſe with the actors, entered into their concerns, ſuggeſted counſel and advice to them, moraliſed on all the incidents that were going on, and during the intervals of the action, ſung their Odes, or Songs, in which they addreſſed the Gods, prayed for ſucceſs to the virtuous, lamented their misfortunes, and delivered many religious and moral ſentiments*.

BUT,

* The office of the Chorus is thus deſcribed by Horace:

Actoris partes Chorus, officiumque virile
Defendat; neu quid medios intercinat actus,
Quod non propoſito conducat, et hæreat aptè.
Ille bonis faveatque, et concilietur amicis,
Et regat iratos, et amet peccare timentes:
Ille dapes laudet menſæ brevis; ille ſalubrem
Juſtitiam, legeſque, & apertis otia portis.

Ille

LECT. XLV.

But, notwithſtanding the advantages which were obtained by means of the Chorus, the inconveniences on the other ſide are ſo great, as to render the modern practice of excluding the Chorus, far more eligible upon the whole. For if a natural and probable imitation of human actions be the chief end of the Drama, no other perſons ought to be brought on the Stage, than thoſe who are neceſſary to the Dramatic action. The introduction of an adventitious company of perſons, who have but a ſlight concern in the buſineſs of the play, is unnatural in itſelf, embarraſſing to the Poet, and, though it may render the ſpectacle ſplendid, tends, undoubtedly, to render it more cold and unintereſting, becauſe more unlike a real tranſaction. The mixture of Muſic, or Song, on the part of the Chorus, with the Dialogue carried

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Ille tegat commiſſa; deoſque precetur, et oret
Ut redeat miſeris, abeat fortuna ſuperbis.

De Art. Poet. 193.

The Chorus muſt ſupport an actor's part,
Defend the virtuous, and adviſe with art;
Govern the choleric, and the proud appeaſe,
And the ſhort feaſts of frugal tables praiſe;
Applaud the juſtice of well-govern'd ſtates,
And peace triumphant with her open gates.
Intruſted ſecrets let them ne'er betray,
But to the righteous Gods with ardour pray,
That fortune, with returning ſmiles, may bleſs
Afflicted worth, and impious pride depreſs;
Yet let their ſongs with apt coherence join,
Promote the plot, and aid the juſt deſign.

Francis.

LECT. XLV.

on by the Actors, is another unnatural circumſtance, removing the repreſentation ſtill farther from the reſemblance of life. The Poet, beſides, is ſubjected to innumerable difficulties, in ſo contriving his plan, that the preſence of the Chorus, during all the incidents of the Play, ſhall conſiſt with any probability. The ſcene muſt be conſtantly, and often abſurdly, laid in ſome public place, that the Chorus may be ſuppoſed to have free acceſs to it. To many things that ought to be tranſacted in private, the Chorus muſt ever be witneſſes; they muſt be the confederates of both parties, who come ſucceſſively upon the Stage, and who are, perhaps, conſpiring againſt each other. In ſhort, the management of a Chorus is an unnatural confinement to a Poet; it requires too great a ſacrifice of probability in the conduct of the action; it has too much the air of a theatrical decoration, to be conſiſtent with that appearance of reality, which a Poet muſt ever preſerve in order to move our paſſions. The origin of Tragedy, among the Greeks, we have ſeen, was a choral Song, or Hymn, to the Gods. There is no wonder, therefore, that on the Greek Stage it ſo long maintained poſſeſſion. But it may confidently, I think, be aſſerted, that if, inſtead of the Dramatic Dialogue having been ſuperadded to the Chorus, the Dialogue itſelf had been the firſt invention, the Chorus would, in that caſe, never have been thought of.

ONE

LECT. XLV.

One uſe, I am of opinion, might ſtill be made of the Antient Chorus, and would be a conſiderable improvement of the Modern Theatre; if, inſtead of that unmeaning, and often improperly choſen Muſic, with which the Audience is entertained in the intervals between the acts, a Chorus were then to be introduced, whoſe Muſic and Songs, though forming no part of the Play, ſhould have a relation to the incidents of the preceding act, and to the diſpoſitions which thoſe incidents are preſumed to have awakened in the Spectators. By this means, the tone of paſſion would be kept up without interruption; and all the good effects of the Antient Chorus might be preſerved, for inſpiring proper ſentiments, and for increaſing the morality of the Performance, without thoſe inconveniences which aroſe from the Chorus forming a conſtituent part of the Play, and mingling unſeaſonably, and unnaturally, with the perſonages of the Drama.

After the view which we have taken of the riſe of Tragedy, and of the nature of the Antient Chorus, with the advantages and inconveniences attending it, our way is cleared for examining, with more advantage, the three Unities of Action, Place, and Time, which have generally been conſidered as eſſential to the proper conduct of the Dramatic Fable.

Of

LECT. XLV.

Of theſe three, the firſt, Unity of Action, is, beyond doubt, far the moſt important. In treating of Epic Poetry, I have already explained the nature of it; as conſiſting in a relation which all the incidents introduced bear to ſome deſign or effect, ſo as to combine naturally into one whole. This unity of ſubject is ſtill more eſſential to Tragedy, than it is to Epic Poetry. For a multiplicity of Plots, or Actions, crowded into ſo ſhort a ſpace as Tragedy allows, muſt, of neceſſity, diſtract the attention, and prevent paſſion from riſing to any height. Nothing, therefore, is worſe conduct in a Tragic Poet, than to carry on two independent actions in the ſame Play; the effect of which is, that the mind being ſuſpended and divided between them, cannot give itſelf up entirely either to the one or the other. There may, indeed, be under-plots; that is, the perſons introduced, may have different purſuits and deſigns; but the Poet's art muſt be ſhown in managing theſe, ſo as to render them ſubſervient to the main action. They ought to be connected with the cataſtrophe of the Play, and to conſpire in bringing it forward. If there be any intrigue which ſtands ſeparate and independent, and which may be left out without affecting the unravelling of the Plot, we may always conclude this to be a faulty violation of Unity. Such Epiſodes are not permitted here, as in Epic Poetry.

LECT. XLV.

We have a clear example of this defect in Mr. Addiſon's Cato. The ſubject of this Tragedy is, the death of Cato; and a very noble perſonage Cato is, and ſupported by the Author with much dignity. But all the love ſcenes in the Play; the paſſion of Cato's two ſons for Lucia, and that of Juba for Cato's daughter, are mere Epiſodes; have no connection with the principal action, and no effect upon it. The Author thought his ſubject too barren in incidents, and in order to diverſify it, he has given us, as it were, by the bye, a hiſtory of the amours that were going on in Cato's family; by which he hath both broken the Unity of his ſubject, and formed a very unſeaſonable junction of gallantry, with the high ſentiments, and public ſpirited paſſions which predominate in other parts, and which the Play was chiefly deſigned to diſplay.

We muſt take care not to confound the Unity of the Action with the Simplicity of the Plot. Unity, and Simplicity, import different things in Dramatic Compoſition. The Plot is ſaid to be Simple, when a ſmall number of incidents are introduced into it. But it may be implex, as the Critics term it, that is, it may include a conſiderable number of perſons and events, and yet not be deficient in Unity; provided all the incidents be made to tend towards the principal object of the Play, and be

LECT. XLV.

properly connected with it. All the Greek Tragedies not only maintain Unity in the Action, but are remarkably Simple in the Plot; to ſuch a degree, indeed, as ſometimes to appear to us too naked, and deſtitute of intereſting events. In the Œdipus Coloneus, for inſtance, of Sophocles, the whole ſubject is no more than this: Œdipus, blind and miſerable, wanders to Athens, and wiſhes to die there; Creon, and his ſon Polynices, arrive at the ſame time, and endeavour, ſeparately, to perſuade the old man to return to Thebes, each with a view to his own intereſt; he will not go; Theſeus, the king of Athens, protects him; and the play ends with his death. In the Philoctetes of the ſame Author, the Plot, or Fable, is nothing more than Ulyſſes, and the ſon of Achilles, ſtudying to perſuade the diſeaſed Philoctetes to leave his uninhabited iſland, and go with them to Troy; which he refuſes to do, till Hercules, whoſe arrows he poſſeſſed, deſcends from Heaven and commands him. Yet theſe ſimple, and ſeemingly barren ſubjects, are wrought up with ſo much art by Sophocles, as to become very tender and affecting.

Among the Moderns, much greater variety of events has been admitted into Tragedy. It has become more the theatre of paſſion than it was among the Antients. A greater diſplay of

of characters is attempted; more intrigue and action are carried on; our curioſity is more awakened, and more intereſting ſituations ariſe. This variety is, upon the whole, an improvement on Tragedy; it renders the entertainment both more animated, and more inſtructive; and when kept within due bounds, may be perfectly conſiſtent with unity of ſubject. But the Poet muſt, at the ſame time, beware of not deviating too far from Simplicity, in the conſtruction of his Fable. For if he overcharges it with Action and Intrigue, it becomes perplexed and embarraſſed; and, by conſequence, loſes much of its effect. Congreve's "Mourning Bride," a Tragedy, otherwiſe far from being void of merit, fails in this reſpect; and may be given as an inſtance of one ſtanding in perfect oppoſition to the ſimplicity of the antient Plots. The incidents ſucceed one another too rapidly. The Play is too full of buſineſs. It is difficult for the mind to follow and comprehend the whole ſeries of events; and, what is the greateſt fault of all, the cataſtrophe, which ought always to be plain and ſimple, is brought about in a manner too artificial and intricate.

LECT. XLV.

Unity of Action muſt not only be ſtudied in the general conſtruction of the Fable, or Plot, but muſt regulate the ſeveral acts and ſcenes, into which the Play is divided.

LECT. XLV.

THE diviſion of every Play, into Five Acts, has no other foundation than common practice, and the authority of Horace:

> Neve minor, neu ſit quinto productior actu
> Fabula.—— DE ARTE POET.*

It is a diviſion purely arbitrary. There is nothing in the nature of the Compoſition which fixes this number rather than any other; and it had been much better if no ſuch number had been aſcertained, but every Play had been allowed to divide itſelf into as many parts, or intervals, as the ſubject naturally pointed out. On the Greek Stage, whatever may have been the caſe on the Roman, the diviſion by Acts was totally unknown. The word, Act, never once occurs in Ariſtotle's Poetics, in which he defines exactly every part of the Drama, and divides it into the beginning, the middle, and the end; or, in his own words, into the Prologue, the Epiſode, and the Exode. The Greek Tragedy was, indeed, one continued repreſentation, from beginning to end. The Stage was never empty, nor the curtain let fall. But, at certain intervals, when the Actors retired, the Chorus continued and ſung. Neither do theſe Songs of the Chorus divide

* If you would have your Play deſerve ſucceſs,
Give it five Acts complete, nor more, nor leſs.
FRANCIS.

the

the Greek Tragedies into five portions, ſimilar to our Acts; though ſome of the Commentators have endeavoured to force them into this office. But it is plain, that the intervals at which the Chorus ſung, are extremely unequal and irregular, ſuited to the occaſion and the ſubject; and would divide the Play ſometimes into three, ſometimes into ſeven or eight Acts*.

As practice has now eſtabliſhed a different plan on the Modern Stage, has divided every Play into Five Acts, and made a total pauſe in the repreſentation at the end of each Act, the Poet muſt be careful that this Pauſe ſhall fall in a proper place; where there is a natural pauſe in the Action; and where, if the imagination has any thing to ſupply, that is not repreſented on the Stage, it may be ſuppoſed to have been tranſacted during the interval.

The Firſt Act ought to contain a clear expoſition of the ſubject. It ought to be ſo managed as to awaken the curioſity of the Spectators; and, at the ſame time, to furniſh them with materials for underſtanding the ſequel. It ſhould make them acquainted with the perſonages who are to appear, with their

* See the Diſſertation prefixed to Franklin's Tranſlation of Sophocles.

LECT. XLV.

ſeveral views and intereſts, and with the ſituation of affairs at the time when the Play commences. A ſtriking Introduction, ſuch as the firſt Speech of Almeria, in the Mourning Bride, and that of Lady Randolph, in Douglas, produces a happy effect; but this is what the ſubject will not always admit. In the ruder times of Dramatic Writing, the expoſition of the ſubject was wont to be made by a Prologue, or by a ſingle Actor appearing, and giving full and direct information to the Spectators. Some of Æchylus's and Euripides's Plays are opened in this manner. But ſuch an Introduction is extremely inartificial, and, therefore, is now totally aboliſhed, and the ſubject made to open itſelf by converſation, among the firſt Actors who are brought upon the Stage.

During the courſe of the Drama, in the Second, Third, and Fourth Acts, the Plot ſhould gradually thicken. The great object which the Poet ought here to have in view, is, by intereſting us in his Story, to keep our paſſions always awake. As ſoon as he allows us to languiſh, there is no more Tragic merit. He ſhould, therefore, introduce no perſonages but ſuch as are neceſſary for carrying on the action. He ſhould contrive to place thoſe, whom he finds it proper to introduce, in the moſt intereſting ſituations. He ſhould have no

LECT. XLV.

no ſcenes of idle converſation, or mere declamation. The Action of the Play ought to be always advancing; and as it advances, the ſuſpenſe, and the concern of the Spectators, to be raiſed more and more. This is the great excellency of Shakeſpeare, that his ſcenes are full of Sentiment and Action, never of mere diſcourſe; whereas, it is often a fault of the beſt French Tragedians, that they allow the Action to languiſh, for the ſake of a long and artful Dialogue. Sentiment, Paſſion, Pity, and Terror, ſhould reign throughout a Tragedy. Every thing ſhould be full of movements. An uſeleſs incident, or an unneceſſary converſation, weakens the intereſt which we take in the Action, and renders us cold and inattentive.

The Fifth Act is the ſeat of the Cataſtrophe, or the unravelling of the Plot, in which we always expect the art and genius of the Poet to be moſt fully diſplayed. The firſt Rule concerning it, is, that it be brought about by probable and natural means. Hence all unravellings which turn upon diſguiſed habits, rencounters by night, miſtakes of one perſon for another, and other ſuch Theatrical and Romantic circumſtances, are to be condemned as faulty. In the next place, the Cataſtrophe ought always to be ſimple; to depend on few events, and to include but few perſons. Paſſion

LECT. XLV.

never riſes ſo high when it is divided among many objects, as when it is directed towards one, or a few. And it is ſtill more checked, if the incidents be ſo complex and intricate, that the underſtanding is put on the ſtretch to trace them, when the heart ſhould be wholly delivered up to emotion. The Cataſtrophe of the Mourning Bride, as I formerly hinted, offends againſt both theſe rules. In the laſt place, the Cataſtrophe of a Tragedy ought to be the reign of pure ſentiment and paſſion. In proportion as it approaches, every thing ſhould warm and glow. No long diſcourſes; no cold reaſonings; no parade of genius, in the midſt of thoſe ſolemn and awful events, that cloſe ſome of the great revolutions of human fortune. There, if any where, the Poet muſt be ſimple, ſerious, pathetic; and ſpeak no language but that of nature.

The Antients were fond of unravellings, which turned upon what is called, an "Ana-"gnoriſis," or, a diſcovery of ſome perſon to be different from what he was taken to be. When ſuch diſcoveries are artfully conducted, and produced in critical ſituations, they are extremely ſtriking; ſuch as that famous one in Sophocles, which makes the whole ſubject of his Œdipus Tyrannus, and which is, undoubtedly, the fulleſt of ſuſpenſe, agitation, and terror, that ever was exhibited on any Stage.

LECT. XLV.

Stage. Among the Moderns, two of the moſt diſtinguiſhed Anagniriſes, are thoſe contained in Voltaire's Merope, and Mr. Home's Douglas: both of which are great maſterpieces of the kind.

It is not eſſential to the Cataſtrophe of a Tragedy, that it ſhould end unhappily. In the courſe of the Play, there may be ſufficient agitation and diſtreſs, and many tender emotions raiſed by the ſufferings and dangers of the virtuous, though, in the end, good men are rendered ſucceſsful. The Tragic Spirit, therefore, does not want ſcope upon this ſyſtem; and, accordingly, the Athalie of Racine, and ſome of Voltaire's fineſt Plays, ſuch as Alzire, Merope, and the Orphan of China, with ſome few Engliſh Tragedies likewiſe, have a fortunate concluſion. But, in general, the ſpirit of Tragedy, eſpecially of Engliſh Tragedy, leans more to the ſide of leaving the impreſſion of virtuous ſorrow full and ſtrong upon the heart.

A QUESTION, intimately connected with this ſubject, and which has employed the ſpeculations of ſeveral Philoſophical Critics, naturally occurs here: How it comes to paſs that thoſe emotions of ſorrow which Tragedy excites, afford any gratification to the mind? For, is not ſorrow, in its nature, a painful paſſion? Is not

LECT. XLV.

not real diſtreſs often occaſioned to the Spectators, by the Dramatic Repreſentations at which they aſſiſt? Do we not ſee their tears flow? and yet, while the impreſſion of what they have ſuffered remains upon their minds, they again aſſemble in crowds, to renew the ſame diſtreſſes. The queſtion is not without difficulty, and various ſolutions of it have been propoſed by ingenious men*. The moſt plain and ſatisfactory account of the matter, appears to me to be the following. By the wiſe and gracious conſtitution of our nature, the exerciſe of all the ſocial paſſions is attended with pleaſure. Nothing is more pleaſing and grateful, than love and friendſhip. Wherever man takes a ſtrong intereſt in the concerns of his fellow-creatures, an internal ſatisfaction is made to accompany the feeling. Pity, or compaſſion, in particular, is, for wiſe ends, appointed to be one of the ſtrongeſt inſtincts of our frame, and is attended with a peculiar attractive power. It is an affection which cannot but be productive of ſome diſtreſs, on account of the ſympathy with the ſufferers, which it neceſſarily involves. But, as it includes benevolence and friendſhip, it partakes,

* See Dr. Campbell's Philoſophy of Rhetoric, Book I. ch. xi. where an account is given of the hypotheſes of different Critics on this ſubject; and where one is propoſed, with which, in the main, I agree.—See alſo Lord Kaimes's Eſſays on the Principles of Morality, Eſſay I. And Mr. David Hume's Eſſay on Tragedy.

at

LECT. XLV.

at the ſame time, of the agreeable and pleaſing nature of thoſe affections. The heart is warmed by kindneſs and humanity, at the ſame moment at which it is afflicted by the diſtreſſes of thoſe with whom it ſympathiſes: and the pleaſure ariſing from thoſe kind emotions, prevails ſo much in the mixture, and ſo far counterbalances the pain, as to render the ſtate of the mind, upon the whole, agreeable. At the ſame time, the immediate pleaſure, which always goes along with the operation of the benevolent and ſympathetic affections, derives an addition from the approbation of our own minds. We are pleaſed with ourſelves, for feeling as we ought, and for entering, with proper ſorrow, into the concerns of the afflicted. In Tragedy, beſides, other adventitious circumſtances concur to diminiſh the painful part of Sympathy, and to increaſe the ſatisfaction attending it. We are, in ſome meaſure, relieved, by thinking that the cauſe of our diſtreſs is feigned, not real; and we are alſo gratified by the charms of Poetry, the propriety of Sentiment and Language, and the beauty of Action. From the concurrence of theſe cauſes, the pleaſure which we receive from Tragedy, notwithſtanding the diſtreſs it occaſions, ſeems to me to be accounted for, in a ſatisfactory manner. At the ſame time, it is to be obſerved, that, as there is always a mixture of pain in the pleaſure, that pain is

LECT. XLV.

capable of being ſo much heightened, by the repreſentation of incidents extremely direful, as to ſhock our feelings, and to render us averſe, either to the reading of ſuch Tragedies, or to the beholding of them upon the Stage.

HAVING now ſpoken of the conduct of the ſubject throughout the Acts, it is alſo neceſſary to take notice of the conduct of the ſeveral ſcenes which make up the Acts of a Play.

THE entrance of a new perſonage upon the Stage, forms, what is called, a New Scene. Theſe ſcenes, or ſucceſſive converſations, ſhould be cloſely linked and connected with each other; and much of the Art of Dramatic Compoſition is ſhown in maintaining this connection. Two rules are neceſſary to be obſerved for this purpoſe.

THE firſt is, that, during the courſe of one Act, the Stage ſhould never be left vacant, though but for a ſingle moment; that is, all the perſons who have appeared in one Scene, or converſation, ſhould never go off together, and be ſucceeded by a new ſet of perſons appearing in the next Scene, independent of the former. This makes a gap, or total interruption in the repreſentation, which, in effect, puts an end to that Act. For, wherever the Stage is evacuated, the Act is cloſed. This

LECT. XLV.

rule is, very generally, obſerved by the French Tragedians; but the Engliſh Writers, both of Comedy and Tragedy, ſeldom pay any regard to it. Their Perſonages ſucceed one another upon the Stage with ſo little connection; the union of their Scenes is ſo much broken, that, with equal propriety, their Plays might be divided into ten or twelve Acts, as into five.

The ſecond rule, which the Engliſh Writers alſo obſerve little better than the former, is, that no perſon ſhould come upon the Stage, or leave it, without a reaſon appearing to us, both for the one and the other. Nothing is more awkward, and contrary to art, than for an Actor to enter, without our ſeeing any cauſe for his appearing in that Scene, except that it was for the Poet's purpoſe he ſhould enter preciſely at ſuch a moment; or for an Actor to go away without any reaſon for his retiring, farther than that the Poet had no more ſpeeches to put into his mouth. This is managing the Perſonæ Dramatis exactly like ſo many puppets, who are moved by wires, to anſwer the call of the maſter of the ſhow. Whereas the perfection of Dramatic Writing requires that every thing ſhould be conducted in imitation, as near as poſſible, of ſome real tranſaction; where we are let into the ſecret of all that is paſſing, where we behold perſons before us always buſy; ſee them coming and going; and know

LECT. XLV.

know perfectly whence they come, and whither they go, and about what they are employed.

ALL that I have hitherto ſaid, relates to the Unity of the Dramatic Action. In order to render the Unity of Action more complete, Critics have added the other two Unities of Time and Place. The ſtrict obſervance of theſe is more difficult, and, perhaps, not ſo neceſſary. The Unity of Place requires, that the Scene ſhould never be ſhifted; but that the Action of the Play ſhould be continued to the end, in the ſame place where it is ſuppoſed to begin. The Unity of Time, ſtrictly taken, requires, that the time of the Action be no longer than the time that is allowed for the Repreſentation of the Play; though Ariſtotle ſeems to have given the Poet a little more liberty, and permitted the Action to comprehend the whole time of one day.

THE intention of both theſe rules is, to overcharge, as little as poſſible, the imagination of the Spectators with improbable circumſtances in the acting of the Play, and to bring the imitation more cloſe to reality. We muſt obſerve, that the nature of Dramatic Exhibitions upon the Greek Stage, ſubjected the Antient Tragedians to a more ſtrict obſervance of theſe Unities than is neceſſary in Modern Theatres. I ſhowed, that a Greek Tragedy was

was one uninterrupted repreſentation, from beginning to end. There was no diviſion of Acts; no pauſes or interval between them; but the Stage was continually full; occupied either by the Actors, or the Chorus. Hence, no room was left for the imagination to go beyond the preciſe time and place of the repreſentation; any more than is allowed during the continuance of one Act, on the Modern Theatre. LECT. XLV.

But the practice of ſuſpending the ſpectacle totally for ſome little time between the Acts, has made a great and material change; gives more latitude to the imagination, and renders the antient ſtrict confinement to time and place leſs neceſſary. While the acting of the Play is interrupted, the Spectator can, without any great or violent effort, ſuppoſe a few hours to paſs between every Act; or can ſuppoſe himſelf moved from one apartment of a palace, or one part of a city to another: and, therefore, too ſtrict an obſervance of theſe Unities, ought not to be preferred to higher beauties of execution, nor to the introduction of more pathetic ſituations, which ſometimes cannot be accompliſhed in any other way, than by the tranſgreſſion of theſe rules.

On the Antient Stage, we plainly ſee the Poets ſtruggling with many an inconvenience,

in

LECT. XLV.

in order to preſerve thoſe Unities which were then ſo neceſſary. As the Scene could never be ſhifted, they were obliged to make it always lie in ſome court of a palace, or ſome public area, to which all the perſons concerned in the action might have equal acceſs. This led to frequent improbabilities, by repreſenting things as tranſacted there, which naturally ought to have been tranſacted before few witneſſes, and in private apartments. The like improbabilities aroſe, from limiting themſelves ſo much in point of time. Incidents were unnaturally crowded; and it is eaſy to point out ſeveral inſtances in the Greek Tragedies, where events are ſuppoſed to paſs during a Song of the Chorus, which muſt neceſſarily have employed many hours.

But though it ſeems neceſſary to ſet Modern Poets free from a ſtrict obſervance of theſe Dramatic Unities, yet we muſt remember, there are certain bounds to this liberty. Frequent and wild changes of time and place; hurrying the Spectator from one diſtant city, or country, to another; or making ſeveral days or weeks to paſs during the courſe of the Repreſentation, are liberties which ſhock the imagination, which give to the performance a romantic and unnatural appearance, and, therefore, cannot be allowed in any Dramatic Writer who aſpires to correctneſs. In particular,

particular, we muſt remember, that it is only between the Acts, that any liberty can be given for going beyond the Unities of Time and Place. During the courſe of each Act, they ought to be ſtrictly obſerved; that is, during each Act the Scene ſhould continue the ſame, and no more time ſhould be ſuppoſed to paſs, than is employed in the repreſentation of that Act. This is a rule which the French Tragedians regularly obſerve. To violate this rule, as is too often done by the Engliſh; to change the place, and ſhift the Scene in the midſt of one Act, ſhows great incorrectneſs, and deſtroys the whole intention of the diviſion of a Play into Acts. Mr. Addiſon's Cato, is remarkable beyond moſt Engliſh Tragedies, for regularity of conduct. The Author has limited himſelf, in time, to a ſingle day; and in place, has maintained the moſt rigorous Unity. The Scene is never changed; and the whole action paſſes in the hall of Cato's houſe, at Utica.

In general, the nearer a Poet can bring the Dramatic Repreſentation, in all its circumſtances, to an imitation of nature and real life, the impreſſion which he makes on us will always be the more perfect. Probability, as I obſerved at the beginning of the Lecture, is highly eſſential to the conduct of the Tragic Action, and we are always hurt by the want of

LECT. XLV.

it. It is this that makes the obſervance of the Dramatic Unities to be of conſequence, as far as they can be obſerved, without ſacrificing more material beauties. It is not, as has been ſometimes ſaid, that, by the preſervation of the Unities of Time and Place, Spectators are deceived into a belief of the reality of the objects which are ſet before them on the Stage; and that, when thoſe Unities are violated, the charm is broken, and they diſcover the whole to be a fiction. No ſuch deception as this can ever be accompliſhed. No one ever imagines himſelf to be at Athens, or Rome, when a Greek or Roman ſubject is preſented on the Stage. He knows the whole to be an imitation only; but he requires that imitation to be conducted with ſkill and veriſimilitude. His pleaſure, the entertainment which he expects, the intereſt which he is to take in the Story, all depend on its being ſo conducted. His imagination, therefore, ſeeks to aid the imitation, and to reſt on the probability; and the Poet, who ſhocks him by improbable circumſtances, and by awkward, unſkilful imitation, deprives him of his pleaſure, and leaves him hurt and diſpleaſed. This is the whole myſtery of the theatrical illuſion.

LECTURE XLVI.

TRAGEDY—GREEK—FRENCH—ENGLISH TRAGEDY.

LECT. XLVI.

HAVING treated of the Dramatic Action in Tragedy, I proceed next to treat of the Characters moſt proper to be exhibited. It has been thought, by ſeveral Critics, that the nature of Tragedy requires the principal perſonages to be always of illuſtrious character, and of high, or princely rank; whoſe misfortunes and ſufferings, it is ſaid, take faſter hold of the imagination, and impreſs the heart more forcibly, than ſimilar events happening to perſons in private life. But this is more ſpecious than ſolid. It is refuted by facts. For the diſtreſſes of Deſdemona, Monimia, and Belvidera, intereſt us as deeply as if they had been princeſſes or queens. The dignity of Tragedy does, indeed, require, that there ſhould be nothing degrading, or mean, in the circumſtances of the perſons which it exhibits; but it requires nothing more. Their high rank may render the ſpectacle more ſplendid,

LECT. XLVI.

and the ſubject ſeemingly of more importance, but conduces very little to its being intereſting or pathetic; which depends entirely on the nature of the Tale, on the art of the Poet in conducting it, and on the ſentiments to which it gives occaſion. In every rank of life, the relations of Father, Huſband, Son, Brother, Lover, or Friend, lay the foundation of thoſe affecting ſituations, which make man's heart feel for man.

THE moral characters of the perſons repreſented, are of much greater conſequence than the external circumſtances in which the Poet places them. Nothing, indeed, in the conduct of Tragedy, demands a Poet's attention more, than ſo to deſcribe his perſonages, and ſo to order the incidents which relate to them, as ſhall leave upon the Spectators, impreſſions favourable to virtue, and to the adminiſtration of Providence. It is not neceſſary, for this end, that poetical juſtice, as it is called, ſhould be obſerved in the cataſtrophe of the Piece. This has been long exploded from Tragedy; the end of which is, to affect us with pity for the virtuous in diſtreſs, and to afford a probable repreſentation of the ſtate of human life, where calamities often befal the beſt, and a mixed portion of good and evil is appointed for all. But, withal, the Author muſt beware of ſhocking our minds with ſuch repreſentations of life as tend to raiſe horror, or to render

der virtue an object of averſion. Though innocent perſons ſuffer, their ſufferings ought to be attended with ſuch circumſtances, as ſhall make virtue appear amiable and venerable; and ſhall render their condition, on the whole, preferable to that of bad men, who have prevailed againſt them. The ſtings, and the remorſe of guilt, muſt ever be repreſented as productive of greater miſeries, than any that the bad can bring upon the good. LECT. XLVI.

ARISTOTLE's obſervations on the characters proper for Tragedy, are very judicious. He is of opinion, that perfect unmixed characters, either of good or ill men, are not the fitteſt to be introduced. The diſtreſſes of the one being wholly unmerited, hurt and ſhock us; and the ſufferings of the other, occaſion no pity. Mixed characters, ſuch as in fact we meet with in the world, afford the moſt proper field for diſplaying, without any bad effect on morals, the viciſſitudes of life; and they intereſt us the more deeply, as they diſplay emotions and paſſions which we have all been conſcious of. When ſuch perſons fall into diſtreſs through the vices of others, the ſubject may be very pathetic; but it is always more inſtructive, when a perſon has been himſelf the cauſe of his misfortune, and when his misfortune is occaſioned by the violence of paſſion, or by ſome weakneſs incident to human nature.

LECT. XLVI.

Such ſubjects both diſpoſe us to the deepeſt ſympathy, and adminiſter uſeful warnings to us for our own conduct.

Upon theſe principles, it ſurpriſes me that the ſtory of Œdipus ſhould have been ſo much celebrated by all the Critics, as one of the fitteſt ſubjects for Tragedy; and ſo often brought upon the Stage, not by Sophocles only, but by Corneille alſo, and Voltaire. An innocent perſon, one, in the main, of a virtuous character, through no crime of his own, nay not by the vices of others, but through mere fatality and blind chance, is involved in the greateſt of all human miſeries. In a caſual rencounter, he kills his father, without knowing him; he afterwards is married to his own mother; and, diſcovering himſelf in the end to have committed both parricide and inceſt, he becomes frantic, and dies in the utmoſt miſery. Such a ſubject excites horror rather than pity. As it is conducted by Sophocles, it is indeed extremely affecting; but it conveys no inſtruction; it awakens in the mind no tender ſympathy; it leaves no impreſſion favourable to virtue or humanity.

It muſt be acknowledged, that the ſubjects of the antient Greek Tragedies were too often founded on mere deſtiny, and inevitable miſfortunes. They were too much mixed with their tales about oracles, and the vengeance of the

LECT. XLVI.

the Gods, which led to many an incident ſufficiently melancholy and tragical; but rather purely tragical, than uſeful or moral. Hence, both the Œdipus's of Sophocles, the Iphigenia in Aulis, the Hecuba of Euripides, and ſeveral of the like kind. In the courſe of the Drama, many moral ſentiments occurred. But the inſtruction, which the Fable of the Play conveyed, ſeldom was any more, than that reverence was owing to the Gods, and ſubmiſſion due to the decrees of Deſtiny. Modern Tragedy has aimed at a higher object, by becoming more the theatre of paſſion; pointing out to men the conſequences of their own miſconduct; ſhowing the direful effects which ambition, jealouſy, love, reſentment, and other ſuch ſtrong emotions, when miſguided, or left unreſtrained, produce upon human life. An Othello, hurried by jealouſy to murder his innocent wife; a Jaffier, enſnared by reſentment and want, to engage in a conſpiracy, and then ſtung with remorſe, and involved in ruin; a Siffredi, through the deceit which he employs for public-ſpirited ends, bringing deſtruction on all whom he loved; a Caliſta, ſeduced into a criminal intrigue, which overwhelms herſelf, her father, and all her friends in miſery: theſe, and ſuch as theſe, are the examples which Tragedy now diſplays to public view; and by means of which, it inculcates on men the proper government of their paſſions.

LECT. XLVI.

Of all the paſſions which furniſh matter to Tragedy, that which has moſt occupied the Modern Stage, is Love. To the Antient Theatre, it was in a manner wholly unknown. In few of their Tragedies is it ever mentioned; and I remember no more than one which turns upon it, the Hippolitus of Euripides. This was owing to the national manners of the Greeks, and to that greater ſeparation of the two ſexes from one another, than has taken place in modern times; aided too, perhaps, by this circumſtance, that no female actors ever appeared on the Antient Stage. But though no reaſon appears for the total excluſion of Love from the Theatre, yet with what juſtice or propriety it has uſurped ſo much place, as to be in a manner the ſole hinge of Modern Tragedy, may be much queſtioned. Voltaire, who is no leſs eminent as a Critic than as a Poet, declares loudly and ſtrongly againſt this predominancy of Love, as both degrading the majeſty, and confining the natural limits of Tragedy. And aſſuredly, the mixing of it perpetually with all the great and ſolemn revolutions of human fortune which belong to the Tragic Stage, tends to give Tragedy too much the air of gallantry, and juvenile entertainment. The Athalie of Racine, the Merope of Voltaire, the Douglas of Mr. Home, are ſufficient proofs, that without any aſſiſtance from

from Love, the Drama is capable of producing its higheſt effects upon the mind.

THIS ſeems to be clear, that wherever Love is introduced into Tragedy, it ought to reign in it, and to give riſe to the principal action. It ought to be that ſort of Love which poſſeſſes all the force and majeſty of paſſion; and which occaſions great and important conſequences. For nothing can have a worſe effect, or be more debaſing to Tragedy, than, together with the manly and heroic paſſions, to mingle a trifling love intrigue, as a ſort of ſeaſoning to the Play. The bad effects of this are ſufficiently conſpicuous both in the Cato of Mr. Addiſon, as I had occaſion before to remark, and in the Iphiginie of Racine.

AFTER a Tragic Poet has arranged his ſubject, and choſen his perſonages, the next thing he muſt attend to, is the propriety of ſentiments; that they be perfectly ſuited to the characters of thoſe perſons to whom they are attributed, and to the ſituations in which they are placed. The neceſſity of obſerving this general rule is ſo obvious, that I need not inſiſt upon it. It is principally in the pathetic parts, that both the difficulty and the importance of it are the greateſt. Tragedy is the region of paſſion. We come to it, expecting to be moved; and let the Poet be ever ſo judicious

LECT. XLVI.

dicious in his conduct, moral in his intentions, and elegant in his Style, yet if he fails in the pathetic, he has no tragic merit; we return cold and diſappointed from the performance; and never deſire to meet with it more.

To paint Paſſion ſo truly and juſtly as to ſtrike the hearts of the Hearers with full ſympathy, is a prerogative of genius given to few. It requires ſtrong and ardent ſenſibility of mind. It requires the Author to have the power of entering deeply into the characters which he draws; of becoming for a moment the very perſon whom he exhibits, and of aſſuming all his feelings. For, as I have often had occaſion to obſerve, there is no poſſibility of ſpeaking properly the language of any paſſion, without feeling it; and it is to the abſence or deadneſs of real emotion, that we muſt aſcribe the want of ſucceſs in ſo many Tragic Writers, when they attempt being pathetic.

No man, for inſtance, when he is under the ſtrong agitations of anger, or grief, or any ſuch violent paſſion, ever thinks of deſcribing to another what his feelings at that time are; or of telling them what he reſembles. This never was, and never will be, the language of any perſon, when he is deeply moved. It is the language of one who deſcribes coolly the condition of

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that perſon to another; or it is the language of the paſſionate perſon himſelf, after his emotion has ſubſided, relating what his ſituation was in the moments of paſſion. Yet this ſort of ſecondary deſcription, is what Tragic Poets too often give us, inſtead of the native and primary language of paſſion. Thus, in Mr. Addiſon's Cato, when Lucia confeſſes to Portius her love for him, but, at the ſame time, ſwears with the greateſt ſolemnity, that in the preſent ſituation of their country ſhe will never marry him; Portius receives this unexpected ſentence with the utmoſt aſtoniſhment and grief; at leaſt the Poet wants to make us believe that he ſo received it. How does he expreſs theſe feelings?

> Fix'd in aſtoniſhment, I gaze upon thee,
> Like one juſt blaſted by a ſtroke from Heav'n,
> Who pants for breath, and ſtiffens yet alive
> In dreadful looks; a monument of wrath.

This makes his whole reply to Lucia. Now did any perſon, who was of a ſudden aſtoniſhed and overwhelmed with ſorrow, ever, ſince the creation of the world, expreſs himſelf in this manner? This is indeed an excellent deſcription to be given us by another, of a perſon who was in ſuch a ſituation. Nothing would have been more proper for a byſtander, recounting this conference, than to have ſaid,

LECT. XLVI.

Fix'd in aſtoniſhment, he gaz'd upon her,
Like one juſt blaſted by a ſtroke from Heav'n,
Who pants for breath, &c.

But the perſon, who is himſelf concerned, ſpeaks, on ſuch an occaſion, in a very different manner. He gives vent to his feelings; he pleads for pity; he dwells upon the cauſe of his grief and aſtoniſhment; but never thinks of deſcribing his own perſon and looks, and ſhowing us, by a ſimile, what he reſembles. Such repreſentations of paſſions are no better in Poetry, than it would be in painting, to make a label iſſue from the mouth of a figure, bidding us remark, that this figure repreſents an aſtoniſhed, or a grieved perſon.

On ſome other occaſions, when Poets do not employ this ſort of deſcriptive language in paſſion, they are too apt to run into forced and unnatural thoughts, in order to exaggerate the feelings of perſons, whom they would paint as very ſtrongly moved. When Oſmyn, in the Mourning Bride, after parting with Almeria, regrets, in a long ſoliloquy, that his eyes only ſee objects that are preſent, and cannot ſee Almeria after ſhe is gone; when Jane Shore, in Mr. Rowe's Tragedy, on meeting with her huſband in her extreme diſtreſs, and finding that he had forgiven her, calls on the rains to give her their drops, and the ſprings to give her their ſtreams, that ſhe may never want

want a ſupply of tears; in ſuch paſſages, we ſee very plainly, that it is neither Oſmyn, nor Jane Shore, that ſpeak; but the Poet himſelf in his own perſon, who, inſtead of aſſuming the feelings of thoſe whom he means to exhibit, and ſpeaking as they would have done in ſuch ſituations, is ſtraining his fancy, and ſpurring up his genius, to ſay ſomething that ſhall be uncommonly ſtrong and lively.

If we attend to the language that is ſpoken by perſons under the influence of real paſſion, we ſhall find it always plain and ſimple; abounding indeed with thoſe figures which expreſs a diſturbed and impetuous ſtate of mind, ſuch as interrogations, exclamations, and apoſtrophes; but never employing thoſe which belong to the mere embelliſhment and parade of Speech. We never meet with any ſubtilty or refinement, in the ſentiments of real paſſion. The thoughts which paſſion ſuggeſts, are always plain and obvious ones, ariſing directly from its object. Paſſion never reaſons nor ſpeculates, till its ardour begins to cool. It never leads to long diſcourſe or declamation. On the contrary, it expreſſes itſelf moſt commonly in ſhort, broken, and interrupted Speeches; correſponding to the violent and deſultory emotions of the mind.

When we examine the French Tragedians by theſe principles, which ſeem clearly founded

LECT. XLVI.

ed in nature, we find them often deficient. Though in many parts of Tragic Compoſition, they have great merit; though in exciting ſoft and tender emotions, ſome of them are very ſucceſsful; yet in the high and ſtrong pathetic, they generally fail. Their paſſionate Speeches too often run into long declamation. There is too much reaſoning and refinement; too much pomp and ſtudied beauty in them. They rather convey a feeble impreſſion of paſſion, than awaken any ſtrong ſympathy in the Reader's mind.

SOPHOCLES and Euripides are much more ſucceſsful in this part of Compoſition. In their pathetic ſcenes, we find no unnatural refinement; no exaggerated thoughts. They ſet before us the plain and direct feelings of nature, in ſimple expreſſive language; and therefore, on great occaſions, they ſeldom fail of touching the heart *. This too is Shake-

* Nothing, for inſtance, can be more touching and pathetic than the addreſs which Medea, in Euripides, makes to her children, when ſhe had formed the reſolution of putting them to death; and nothing more natural, than the conflict which ſhe is deſcribed as ſuffering within herſelf on that occaſion:

Φευ, φευ· τι προσδεξκεσθε μ' ομμασιν τεκνα;
Τι προσγελατε τον παυσατον γελων;
Αι, αι· τι δρασω; καρδια γαρ οιχεται.
Γυναικες, ὁμμα φαιδρον ως ειδον τεκνων
Ουκ ἀν δυναιμην. χαιρετω βουλευματα, &c.

EUR. MED. L. 1040.

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ſpeare's great excellency; and to this it is principally owing, that his dramatic productions, notwithſtanding their many imperfections, have been ſo long the favourites of the Public. He is more faithful to the true language of Nature, in the midſt of paſſion, than any Writer. He gives us this language, unadulterated by art; and more inſtances of it can be quoted from him, than from all other Tragic Poets taken together. I ſhall refer only to that admirable ſcene in Macbeth, where Macduff receives the account of his wife, and all his children being ſlaughtered in his abſence. The emotions, firſt of grief, and then of the moſt fierce reſentment riſing againſt Macbeth, are painted in ſuch a manner that there is no heart but muſt feel them, and no fancy can conceive any thing more expreſſive of Nature.

With regard to moral ſentiments and reflections in Tragedies, it is clear that they muſt not recur too often. They loſe their effect, when unſeaſonably crowded. They render the Play pedantic and declamatory. This is remarkably the caſe with thoſe Latin Tragedies which go under the name of Seneca, which are little more than a collection of declamations and moral ſentences, wrought up with a quaint brilliancy, which ſuited the prevailing taſte of that age.

LECT. XLVI.

I AM not, however, of opinion, that moral reflections ought to be altogether omitted in Tragedies. When properly introduced, they give dignity to the Compoſition, and, on many occaſions, they are extremely natural. When perſons are under any uncommon diſtreſs, when they are beholding in others, or experiencing in themſelves, the viciſſitudes of human fortune; indeed, when they are placed in any of the great and trying ſituations of life, ſerious and moral reflections naturally occur to them, whether they be perſons of much virtue or not. Almoſt every human being is, on ſuch occaſions, diſpoſed to be ſerious. It is then the natural tone of the mind; and therefore no Tragic Poet ſhould omit ſuch proper opportunities, when they occur, for favouring the intereſts of virtue. Cardinal Wolſey's ſoliloquy upon his fall, for inſtance, in Shakeſpeare, when he bids a long farewell to all his greatneſs, and the advices which he afterwards gives to Cromwell, are, in his ſituation, extremely natural; touch and pleaſe all Readers; and are at once inſtructive and affecting. Much of the merit of Mr. Addiſon's Cato depends upon that moral turn of thought which diſtinguiſhes it. I have had occaſion, both in this Lecture and in the preceding one, to take notice of ſome of its defects; and certainly neither for warmth of paſſion, nor proper conduct of the plot, is it at all eminent. It does

LECT. XLVI.

not, however, follow, that it is deſtitute of merit. For, by the purity and beauty of the language, by the dignity of Cato's character, by that ardour of public ſpirit, and thoſe virtuous ſentiments of which it is full, it has always commanded high regard; and has, both in our own country and among foreigners, acquired no ſmall reputation.

The Style and Verſification of Tragedy, ought to be free, eaſy, and varied. Our blank verſe is happily ſuited to this purpoſe. It has ſufficient majeſty for raiſing the Style; it can deſcend to the ſimple and familiar; it is ſuſceptible of great variety of cadence; and is quite free from the conſtraint and monotony of rhyme. For monotony is, above all things, to be avoided by a Tragic Poet. If he maintains every where the ſame ſtatelineſs of Style, if he uniformly keeps up the ſame run of meaſure and harmony in his Verſe, he cannot fail of becoming inſipid. He ſhould not indeed ſink into flat and careleſs lines; his Style ſhould always have force and dignity, but not the uniform dignity of Epic Poetry. It ſhould aſſume that briſkneſs and eaſe, which is ſuited to the freedom of dialogue, and the fluctuations of paſſion.

One of the greateſt misfortunes of the French Tragedy is, its being always written in rhyme. The nature of the French language,

LECT. XLVI.

indeed, requires this, in order to diſtinguiſh the Style from mere Proſe. But it fetters the freedom of the Tragic Dialogue, fills it with a languid monotony, and is, in a manner, fatal to the high ſtrength and power of paſſion. Voltaire maintains, that the difficulty of compoſing in French Rhyme, is one great cauſe of the pleaſure which the Audience receives from the Compoſition. Tragedy would be ruined, ſays he, if we were to write it in Blank Verſe; take away the difficulty, and you take away the whole merit. A ſtrange idea! as if the entertainment of the Audience aroſe, not from the emotions which the Poet is ſucceſsful in awakening, but from a reflection on the toil which he endured in his cloſet, from aſſorting male and female Rhymes. With regard to thoſe ſplendid compariſons in Rhyme, and ſtrings of couplets, with which it was, ſome time ago, faſhionable for our Engliſh Poets to conclude, not only every act of a Tragedy, but ſometimes alſo the moſt intereſting Scenes, nothing need be ſaid, but that they were the moſt perfect barbariſms; childiſh ornaments, introduced to pleaſe a falſe taſte in the Audience; and now univerſally laid aſide.

HAVING thus treated of all the different parts of Tragedy, I ſhall conclude the ſubject, with a ſhort view of the Greek, the French, and the Engliſh Stage, and with obſervations on the principal Writers.

MOST

LECT. XLVI.

Most of the distinguishing characters of the Greek Tragedy have been already occasionally mentioned. It was embellished with the Lyric Poetry of the Chorus, of the origin of which, and of the advantages and disadvantages attending it, I treated fully in the preceding Lecture. The Plot was always exceedingly simple. It admitted of few incidents. It was conducted, with a very exact regard to the unities of action, time, and place. Machinery, or the intervention of the Gods, was employed; and, which is very faulty, the final unravelling sometimes made to turn upon it. Love, except in one or two instances, was never admitted into the Greek Tragedy. Their subjects were often founded on destiny, or inevitable misfortunes. A vein of religious and moral sentiment always runs through them; but they made less use than the Moderns of the combat of the passions, and of the distresses which our passions bring upon us. Their Plots were all taken from the antient traditionary stories of their own nation. Hercules furnishes matter for two Tragedies. The history of Œdipus, king of Thebes, and his unfortunate family, for six. The war of Troy, with its consequences, for no fewer than seventeen. There is only one, of later date than this; which is the Persæ, or expedition of Xerxes, by Æschylus.

LECT. XLVI.

ÆSCHYLUS is the Father of Greek Tragedy, and exhibits both the beauties, and the defects, of an early original Writer. He is bold, nervous, and animated; but very obſcure and difficult to be underſtood; partly by reaſon of the incorrect ſtate in which we have his works (they having ſuffered more by time, than any of the Antient Tragedians), and partly on account of the nature of his Style, which is crowded with metaphors, often harſh and tumid. He abounds with martial ideas and deſcriptions. He has much fire and elevation; leſs of tenderneſs, than of force. He delights in the marvellous. The Ghoſt of Darius in the Perſæ, the Inſpiration of Caſſandra in Agamemnon, and the Songs of the Furies in the Eumenides, are beautiful in their kind, and ſtrongly expreſſive of his genius.

SOPHOCLES is the moſt maſterly of the three Greek Tragedians; the moſt correct in the conduct of his ſubjects; the moſt juſt and ſublime in his ſentiments. He is eminent for his deſcriptive talent. The relation of the death of Œdipus, in his Œdipus Coloneus, and of the death of Hæmon and Antigone, in his Antigone, are perfect patterns of deſcription to Tragic Poets. Euripides is eſteemed more tender than Sophocles; and he is fuller of moral ſentiments. But, in the conduct of his plays, he is more incorrect and negligent; his expoſitions, or openings of the ſubject, are made

made in a leſs artful manner; and the Songs of his Chorus, though remarkably poetical, have, commonly, leſs connection with the main action, than thoſe of Sophocles. Both Euripides and Sophocles, however, have very high merit as Tragic Poets. They are elegant and beautiful in their Style; juſt, for the moſt part, in their thoughts; they ſpeak with the voice of nature; and making allowance for the difference of antient and modern ideas, in the midſt of all their ſimplicity, they are touching and intereſting.

The circumſtances of theatrical repreſentation on the ſtages of Greece and Rome, were, in ſeveral reſpects, very ſingular, and widely different from what obtains among us. Not only were the Songs of the Chorus accompanied with inſtrumental muſic, but as the Abbé de Bos, in his Reflections on Poetry and Painting, has proved, with much curious erudition, the dialogue part had alſo a modulation of its own, which was capable of being ſet to notes; it was carried on in a ſort of recitative between the actors, and was ſupported by inſtruments. He has farther attempted to prove, but the proof ſeems more incomplete, that on ſome occaſions, on the Roman ſtage, the pronouncing and geſticulating parts were divided; that one actor ſpoke, and another performed the geſtures and motions corre-

LECT. XLVI.

ſponding to what the firſt ſaid. The actors in Tragedy wore a long robe, called Syrma, which flowed upon the Stage. They were raiſed upon Cothurni, which rendered their ſtature uncommonly high; and they always played in maſques. Theſe maſques were like helmets, which covered the whole head; the mouths of them were ſo contrived, as to give an artificial ſound to the voice, in order to make it be heard over their vaſt theatres; and the viſage was ſo formed and painted, as to ſuit the age, characters, or diſpoſitions of the perſons repreſented. When, during the courſe of one Scene, different emotions were to appear in the ſame perſon, the maſque is ſaid to have been ſo painted, that the Actor, by turning one or other profile of his face to the Spectators, expreſſed the change of the ſituation. This, however, was a contrivance attended with many diſadvantages. The maſque muſt have deprived the Spectators of all the pleaſure which ariſes from the natural animated expreſſion of the eye, and the countenance; and, joined with the other circumſtances which I have mentioned, is apt to give us but an unfavourable idea of the dramatic repreſentations of the Antients. In defence of them, it muſt, at the ſame time, be remembered, that their theatres were vaſtly more extenſive in the area than ours, and filled with immenſe crowds. They were always uncovered, and expoſed to the

the open air. The actors were beheld at a much greater distance, and of course much more imperfectly by the bulk of the Spectators, which both rendered their looks of less consequence, and might make it in some degree necessary that their features should be exaggerated, the sound of their voices enlarged, and their whole appearance magnified beyond the life, in order to make the stronger impression. It is certain, that, as dramatic spectacles were the favourite entertainments of the Greeks and Romans, the attention given to their proper exhibition, and the magnificence of the apparatus bestowed on their theatres, far exceeded any thing that has been attempted in modern ages. LECT. XLVI.

In the Compositions of some of the French Dramatic Writers, particularly Corneille, Racine, and Voltaire, Tragedy has appeared with much lustre and dignity. They must be allowed to have improved upon the Antients, in introducing more incidents, a greater variety of passions, a fuller display of characters, and in rendering the subject thereby more interesting. They have studied to imitate the antient models in regularity of conduct. They are attentive to all the unities, and to all the decorums of sentiment and morality; and their Style is, generally, very poetical and elegant. What an English taste is most apt to censure in them, is the want of fervour, strength, and

LECT. XLVI.

the natural language of paſſion. There is often too much converſation in their pieces, inſtead of action. They are too declamatory, as was before obſerved, when they ſhould be paſſionate; too refined, when they ſhould be ſimple. Voltaire freely acknowledges theſe defects of the French Theatre. He admits, that their beſt Tragedies do not make a ſufficient impreſſion on the heart; that the gallantry which reigns in them, and the long fine-ſpun dialogue with which they over-abound, frequently ſpread a languor over them; that the Authors ſeemed to be afraid of being too tragic; and very candidly gives it as his judgment, that an union of the vehemence and the action, which characteriſe the Engliſh Theatre, with the correctneſs and decorum of the French Theatre, would be neceſſary to form a perfect Tragedy.

CORNEILLE, who is properly the Father of French Tragedy, is diſtinguiſhed by the majeſty and grandeur of his ſentiments, and the fruitfulneſs of his imagination. His genius was unqueſtionably very rich, but ſeemed more turned towards the Epic than the Tragic vein; for, in general, he is magnificent and ſplendid, rather than tender and touching. He is the moſt declamatory of all the French Tragedians. He united the copiouſneſs of Dryden with the fire of Lucan, and he reſembles them alſo

alſo in their faults; in their extravagance and impetuoſity. He has compoſed a great number of Tragedies, very unequal in their merit. His beſt and moſt eſteemed pieces, are the Cid, Horace, Polyeucte, and Cinna.

RACINE, as a Tragic Poet, is much ſuperior to Corneille. He wanted the copiouſneſs and grandeur of Corneille's imagination; but is free from his bombaſt, and excels him greatly in tenderneſs. Few Poets, indeed, are more tender and moving than Racine. His Phædra, his Andromaque, his Athalie, and his Mithridate, are excellent dramatic performances, and do no ſmall honour to the French Stage. His language and verſification are uncommonly beautiful. Of all the French Authors, he appears to me to have moſt excelled in Poetical Style; to have managed their Rhyme with the greateſt advantage and facility, and to have given it the moſt complete harmony. Voltaire has, again and again, pronounced Racine's Athalie to be the "Chef d'Oeuvre" of the French Stage. It is altogether a ſacred drama, and owes much of its elevation to the Majeſty of Religion; but it is leſs tender and intereſting than Andromaque. Racine has formed two of his plays upon plans of Euripides. In the Phædra he is extremely ſucceſsful, but not ſo, in my opinion, in the Iphigenie; where he has degraded the antient characters, by unſeaſonable

LECT. XLVI.

able gallantry. Achilles is a French Lover; and Eriphile, a modern Lady*.

VOLTAIRE,

* The characters of Corneille and Racine are happily contraſted with each other, in the following beautiful lines of a French Poet, which will gratify ſeveral readers.

CORNEILLE.

Illum nobilibus majeſtas evehit alis
Vertice tangentem nubes: ſtant ordine longo
Magnanimi circum heroës, fulgentibus omnes
Induti trabeis; Polyeuctus, Cinna, Seleucus,
Et Cidus, et rugis ſignatus Horatius ora.

RACINE.

Hunc circumvolitat penna alludente Cupido,
Vincla triumphatis inſternens florea ſcenis;
Colligit hæc mollis genius, levibuſque catenis
Heroas ſtringit dociles, Pyrrhoſque, Titoſque,
Pelidaſque, ac Hippolytos, qui ſponte ſequuntur
Servitium, facileſque ferunt in vincula palmas.
Ingentes nimirum animos Cornelius ingens,
Et quales habet ipſe, ſuis heröibus affiat
Sublimes ſenſus; vox olli maſcula, magnum os,
Nec mortale ſonans. Rapido fluit impete vena,
Vena Sophocleis non inficianda fluentis.
Racinius Gallis haud viſos ante theatris
Mollior ingenio teneros induxit amores.
Magnanimos quamvis ſenſus ſub pectore verſet
Agrippina, licet Romano robore Burrhus
Polleat, et magni generoſa ſuperbia Pori
Non ſemel eniteat, tamen eſſe ad mollia natum
Credideris vatem; vox olli mellea, lenis
Spiritus eſt; non ille animis vim concitus infert,
At cœcos animorum aditus rimatur, et imis
Mentibus occultos, ſyren penetrabilis, ictus
Inſinuans, palpando ferit, læditque placendo.

Vena

VOLTAIRE, in ſeveral of his Tragedies, is inferior to none of his predeceſſors. In one great article, he has outdone them all, in the delicate and intereſting ſituations which he has contrived to introduce. In theſe, lies his chief ſtrength. He is not, indeed, exempt from the defects of the other French Tragedians, of wanting force, and of being ſometimes too long and declamatory in his ſpeeches; but his characters are drawn with ſpirit, his events are ſtriking, and in his ſentiments there is much elevation. His Zaire, Alzire, Meropé, and Orphan of China, are four capital Tragedies, and deſerve the higheſt praiſe. What one might perhaps not expect, Voltaire is, in the ſtrain of his ſentiments, the moſt religious, and the moſt moral, of all Tragic Poets.

THOUGH the muſical Dramas of Metaſtaſio fulfil not the character of juſt and regular Tragedies, they approach however ſo near to

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Vena fluit facili non intermiſſa nitore,
Nec rapidos ſemper volvit cum murmure fluctus,
Agmine ſed leni fluitat. Seu gramina lambit
Rivulus, et cœco per prata virentia lapſu,
Aufugiens, tacita fluit indeprenſus arena;
Flore micant ripæ illimes; huc vulgus amantum
Convolat, et lacrymis auget rivalibus undas:
Singultus undæ referunt, gemituſque ſonoros
Ingeminant, molli gemitus imitante ſuſurro.
Templum Tragœdiæ, per FR. MARSY, è Societate Jeſu.

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LECT. XLVI.

it, and poſſeſs ſo much merit, that it would be unjuſt to paſs them over without notice. For the elegance of Style, the charms of Lyric Poetry, and the beauties of ſentiment, they are eminent. They abound in well-contrived and intereſting ſituations. The dialogue, by its cloſeneſs and rapidity, carries a conſiderable reſemblance to that of the Antient Greek Tragedies; and is both more animated and more natural, than the long declamation of the French Theatre. But the ſhortneſs of the ſeveral Dramas, and the intermixture of ſo much Lyric Poetry as belongs to this ſort of Compoſition, often occaſions the courſe of the incidents to be hurried on too quickly, and prevents that conſiſtent diſplay of characters, and that full preparation of events, which are neceſſary to give a proper veriſimilitude to Tragedy.

It only now remains to ſpeak of the ſtate of Tragedy in Great Britain; the general character of which is, that it is more animated and paſſionate than French Tragedy, but more irregular and incorrect, and leſs attentive to decorum and to elegance. The pathetic, it muſt always be remembered, is the ſoul of Tragedy. The Engliſh, therefore, muſt be allowed to have aimed at the higheſt ſpecies of excellence; though, in the execution, they have not always joined the other beauties that ought to accompany the pathetic.

LECT. XLVI.

THE firſt object which preſents itſelf to us on the Engliſh Theatre, is the great Shakeſpeare. Great he may be juſtly called, as the extent and force of his natural genius, both for Tragedy and Comedy, are altogether unrivalled*. But, at the ſame time, it is genius ſhooting wild; deficient in juſt taſte, and altogether unaſſiſted by knowledge or art. Long has he been idoliſed by the Britiſh nation; much has been ſaid, and much has been written concerning him; Criticiſm has been drawn to the very dregs, in commentaries upon his words and witticiſms; and yet it remains, to this day, in doubt, whether his beauties, or his faults, be greateſt. Admirable ſcenes, and paſſages, without number, there are in his Plays; paſſages beyond what are to be found in any other

* The character which Dryden has drawn of Shakeſpeare is not only juſt, but uncommonly elegant and happy. "He was the man, who of all modern, and perhaps antient "Poets, had the largeſt and moſt comprehenſive ſoul. All "the images of Nature were ſtill preſent to him, and he "drew them not laboriouſly, but luckily. When he de-"ſcribes any thing, you more than ſee it; you feel it too. "They who accuſe him of wanting learning, give him the "greateſt commendation. He was naturally learned. He "needed not the Spectacles of Books to read Nature. He "looked inward, and found her there. I cannot ſay he is "every where alike. Were he ſo, I ſhould do him injury, "to compare him to the greateſt of mankind. He is many "times flat and inſipid; his comic wit degenerating into "clenches; his ſerious ſwelling into bombaſt. But he is "always great, when ſome great occaſion is preſented to "him." DRYDEN's Eſſay of Dramatic Poetry.

LECT. XLVI.

Dramatic Writer; but there is hardly any one of his Plays which can be called altogether a good one, or which can be read with uninterrupted pleaſure from beginning to end. Beſides extreme irregularities in conduct, and groteſque mixtures of ſerious and comic in one piece, we are often interrupted by unnatural thoughts, harſh expreſſions, a certain obſcure bombaſt, and a play upon words, which he is fond of purſuing; and theſe interruptions to our pleaſure too frequently occur, on occaſions when we would leaſt wiſh to meet with them. All theſe faults, however, Shakeſpeare redeems, by two of the greateſt excellencies which any Tragic Poet can poſſeſs; his lively and diverſified paintings of character; his ſtrong and natural expreſſions of paſſion. Theſe are his two chief virtues; on theſe his merit reſts. Notwithſtanding his many abſurdities, all the while we are reading his Plays, we find ourſelves in the midſt of our fellows; we meet with men, vulgar perhaps in their manners, coarſe or harſh in their ſentiments, but ſtill they are men; they ſpeak with human voices, and are actuated by human paſſions; we are intereſted in what they ſay or do, becauſe we feel that they are of the ſame nature with ourſelves. It is therefore no matter of wonder, that from the more poliſhed and regular, but more cold and artificial performances of other Poets, the Public ſhould return with pleaſure

pleaſure to ſuch warm and genuine repreſentations of human nature. Shakeſpeare poſſeſſes likewiſe the merit of having created, for himſelf, a ſort of world of præternatural beings. His witches, ghoſts, fairies, and ſpirits of all kinds, are deſcribed with ſuch circumſtances of awful and myſterious ſolemnity, and ſpeak a language ſo peculiar to themſelves, as ſtrongly to affect the imagination. His two maſterpieces, and in which, in my opinion, the ſtrength of his genius chiefly appears, are, Othello and Macbeth. With regard to his hiſtorical plays, they are, properly ſpeaking, neither Tragedies nor Comedies; but a peculiar ſpecies of Dramatic Entertainment, calculated to deſcribe the manners of the times of which he treats, to exhibit the principal characters, and to fix our imagination on the moſt intereſting events and revolutions of our own country*.

After the age of Shakeſpeare, we can produce in the Engliſh language ſeveral detached Tragedies of conſiderable merit. But we have not many Dramatic Writers, whoſe whole works are intitled either to particular criticiſm, or very high praiſe. In the Tragedies of Dryden and Lee, there is much fire, but mixed

* See an excellent defence of Shakeſpeare's Hiſtorical Plays, and ſeveral juſt obſervations on his peculiar excellencies as a Tragic Poet, in Mrs. Montague's Eſſay on the Writings and Genius of Shakeſpeare.

LECT. XLVI.

with much fuſtian and rant. Lee's "Theodoſius," or the "Force of Love," is the beſt of his pieces, and, in ſome of the ſcenes, does not want tenderneſs and warmth; though romantic in the plan, and extravagant in the ſentiments. Otway was endowed with a high portion of the Tragic ſpirit; which appears to great advantage in his two principal Tragedies, "the "Orphan" and "Venice Preſerved." In theſe, he is perhaps too Tragic; the diſtreſſes being ſo deep, as to tear and overwhelm the mind. He is a Writer, doubtleſs, of genius and ſtrong paſſion; but, at the ſame time, exceedingly groſs and indelicate. No Tragedies are leſs moral than thoſe of Otway. There are no generous or noble ſentiments in them; but a licentious ſpirit often diſcovers itſelf. He is the very oppoſite of the French decorum; and has contrived to introduce obſcenity and indecent alluſions, into the midſt of deep Tragedy.

Rowe's Tragedies make a contraſt to thoſe of Otway. He is full of elevated and moral ſentiments. The Poetry is often good, and the language always pure and elegant: but, in moſt of his Plays, he is too cold and unintereſting; and flowery rather than tragic. Two, however, he has produced, which deſerve to be exempted from this cenſure, Jane Shore and the Fair Penitent; in both of which, there

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are ſo many tender and truly pathetic ſcenes, as to render them juſtly favourites of the Public.

Dr. Younge's Revenge, is a play which diſcovers genius and fire; but wants tenderneſs, and turns too much upon the ſhocking and direful paſſions. In Congreve's Mourning Bride, there are ſome fine ſituations, and much good Poetry. The two firſt Acts are admirable. The meeting of Almeria with her huſband Oſmyn, in the tomb of Anſelmo, is one of the moſt ſolemn and ſtriking ſituations to be found in any Tragedy. The defects in the cataſtrophe, I pointed out in the laſt Lecture. Mr. Thomſon's Tragedies are too full of a ſtiff morality, which renders them dull and formal. Tancred and Sigiſmunda, far excells the reſt; and for the plot, the characters, and ſentiments, juſtly deſerves a place among the beſt Engliſh Tragedies. Of later pieces, and of living Authors, it is not my purpoſe to treat.

Upon the whole; reviewing the Tragic Compoſitions of different nations, the following concluſions ariſe. A Greek Tragedy is the relation of any diſtreſsful or melancholy incident; ſometimes the effect of paſſion or crime, oftner of the decree of the Gods, ſimply expoſed; without much variety of parts or

LECT. XLVI.

events, but naturally and beautifully ſet before us; heightened by the Poetry of the Chorus. A French Tragedy, is a ſeries of artful and refined converſations, founded upon a variety of tragical and intereſting ſituations; carried on with little action and vehemence; but with much poetical beauty, and high propriety and decorum. An Engliſh Tragedy is the combat of ſtrong paſſions, ſet before us in all their violence; producing deep diſaſters; often irregularly conducted; abounding in action; and filling the Spectators with grief. The Antient Tragedies were more natural and ſimple; the Modern are more artful and complex. Among the French, there is more correctneſs; among the Engliſh, more fire. Andromaque and Zayre, ſoften; Othello and Venice Preſerved, rend the heart. It deſerves remark, that three of the greateſt maſter-pieces of the French Tragic Theatre, turn wholly upon religious ſubjects: the Athalie of Racine, the Polyeucte of Corneille, and the Zayre of Voltaire. The firſt is founded upon a hiſtorical paſſage of the Old Teſtament; in the other two, the diſtreſs ariſes from the zeal and attachment of the principal perſonages to the Chriſtian faith; and in all the three, the Authors have, with much propriety, availed themſelves of the Majeſty which may be derived from religious ideas.

LECTURE XLVII.

COMEDY—GREEK AND ROMAN—FRENCH—ENGLISH COMEDY.

LECT. XLVII.

COMEDY is ſufficiently diſcriminated from Tragedy, by its general ſpirit and ſtrain. While pity and terror, and the other ſtrong paſſions, form the province of the latter, the chief, or rather ſole inſtrument of the former, is ridicule. Comedy propoſes for its object, neither the great ſufferings nor the great crimes of men; but their follies and ſlighter vices, thoſe parts of their character, which raiſe in beholders a ſenſe of impropriety, which expoſe them to be cenſured, and laughed at by others, or which render them troubleſome in civil ſociety.

THIS general idea of Comedy, as a ſatirical exhibition of the improprieties and follies of mankind, is an idea very moral and uſeful. There is nothing in the nature, or general plan of this kind of Compoſition, that renders

LECT. XLVII.

it liable to cenſure. To poliſh the manners of men, to promote attention to the proper decorums of ſocial behaviour, and, above all, to render vice ridiculous, is doing a real ſervice to the world. Many vices might be more ſucceſsfully exploded, by employing ridicule againſt them, than by ſerious attacks and arguments. At the ſame time, it muſt be confeſſed, that ridicule is an inſtrument of ſuch a nature, that when managed by unſkilful, or improper hands, there is hazard of its doing miſchief, inſtead of good, to ſociety. For ridicule is far from being, as ſome have maintained it to be, a proper teſt of truth. On the contrary, it is apt to miſlead, and ſeduce, by the colours which it throws upon its objects; and it is often more difficult to judge, whether theſe colours be natural and proper, than it is to diſtinguiſh between ſimple truth and error. Licentious Writers, therefore, of the Comic claſs, have too often had it in their power to caſt a ridicule upon characters and objects which did not deſerve it. But this is a fault, not owing to the nature of Comedy, but to the genius and turn of the Writers of it. In the hands of a looſe immoral Author, Comedy will miſlead and corrupt; while, in thoſe of a virtuous and well-intentioned one, it will be not only a gay and innocent, but a laudable and uſeful entertainment. French Comedy is an excellent ſchool of manners; while

while Engliſh Comedy has been too often the ſchool of vice. LECT. XLVII.

THE rules reſpecting the Dramatic Action, which I delivered in the firſt Lecture upon Tragedy, belong equally to Comedy; and hence, of courſe, our diſquiſitions concerning it are ſhortened. It is equally neceſſary to both theſe forms of Dramatic Compoſition, that there be a proper unity of action and ſubject: that the unities of time and place, be, as much as poſſible, preſerved; that is, that the time of the action be brought within reaſonable bounds; and the place of the action never changed, at leaſt, not during the courſe of each Act; that the ſeveral Scenes or ſucceſſive converſations be properly linked together; that the Stage be never totally evacuated till the Act cloſes; and that the reaſon ſhould appear to us, why the perſonages, who fill up the different Scenes, enter and go off the Stage, at the time when they are made to do ſo. The ſcope of all theſe rules, I ſhowed, was to bring the imitation as near as poſſible to probability; which is always neceſſary, in order to any imitation giving us pleaſure. This reaſon requires, perhaps, a ſtricter obſervance of the dramatic rules in Comedy, than in Tragedy. For the action of Comedy being more familiar to us than that of Tragedy, more like what we are accuſtomed to ſee in common life, we

LECT. XLVII.

judge more eaſily of what is probable, and are more hurt by the want of it. The probable, and the natural, both in the conduct of the ſtory, and in the characters and ſentiments of the perſons who are introduced, are the great foundation, it muſt always be remembered, of the whole beauty of Comedy.

THE ſubjects of Tragedy are not limited to any country, or to any age. The Tragic Poet may lay his Scene in whatever region he pleaſes. He may form his ſubject upon the hiſtory, either of his own, or of a foreign country; and he may take it from any period that is agreeable to him, however remote in time. The reverſe of this holds in Comedy, for a clear and obvious reaſon. In the great vices, great virtues, and high paſſions, men of all countries and ages reſemble one another; and are therefore equally ſubjects for the Tragic Muſe. But thoſe decorums of behaviour, thoſe leſſer diſcriminations of character, which afford ſubject for Comedy, change with the differences of countries and times; and can never be ſo well underſtood by foreigners, as by natives. We weep for the heroes of Greece and Rome, as freely as we do for thoſe of our own country: but we are touched with the ridicule of ſuch manners and ſuch characters only, as we ſee and know; and therefore the ſcene and ſubject of Comedy

ſhould

LECT. XLVII.

ſhould always be laid in our own country, and in our own times. The Comic Poet, who aims at correcting improprieties and follies of behaviour, ſhould ſtudy "to catch the manners living as they riſe." It is not his buſineſs to amuſe us with a tale of the laſt age, or with a Spaniſh or a French intrigue; but to give us pictures taken from among ourſelves; to ſatirize reigning and preſent vices; to exhibit to the age a faithful copy of itſelf, with its humours, its follies, and its extravagancies. It is only by laying his plan in this manner, that he can add weight and dignity to the entertainment which he gives us. Plautus, it is true, and Terence, did not follow this rule. They laid the ſcene of their Comedies in Greece, and adopted the Greek laws and cuſtoms. But it muſt be remembered, that Comedy was, in their age, but a new entertainment in Rome; and that then they contented themſelves with imitating, often with tranſlating merely, the Comedies of Menander, and other Greek Writers. In after-times, it is known that the Romans had the "Comœdia Togata," or what was founded on their own manners, as well as the "Comœdia Palliata," or what was taken from the Greeks.

COMEDY may be divided into two kinds; Comedy of Character, and Comedy of Intrigue.

LECT. XLVII.

trigue. In the latter, the plot, or the action of the Play, is made the principal object. In the former, the diſplay of ſome peculiar character is chiefly aimed at; the action is contrived altogether with a view to this end, and is treated as ſubordinate to it. The French abound moſt in Comedies of Character. All Moliere's capital Pieces are of this ſort; his Avare, for inſtance, Miſanthrope, Tartuffe; and ſuch are Deſtouches's alſo, and thoſe of the other chief French Comedians. The Engliſh abound more in Comedies of Intrigue. In the Plays of Congreve, and, in general, in all our Comedies, there is much more ſtory, more buſtle and action, than on the French Theatre.

In order to give this ſort of Compoſition its proper advantage, theſe two kinds ſhould be properly mixed together. Without ſome intereſting and well-conducted ſtory, mere converſation is apt to become inſipid. There ſhould be always as much intrigue, as to give us ſomething to wiſh, and ſomething to fear. The incidents ſhould ſo ſucceed one another, as to produce ſtriking ſituations, and to fix our attention; while they afford at the ſame time a proper field for the exhibition of character. For the Poet muſt never forget, that to exhibit characters and manners, is his principal object. The action in Comedy, though it demands his

his care, in order to render it animated and natural, is a leſs ſignificant and important part of the performance, than the action in Tragedy: as in Comedy, it is what men ſay, and how they behave, that draws our attention, rather than what they perform, or what they ſuffer. Hence it is a great fault to overcharge it with too much intrigue; and thoſe intricate Spaniſh plots that were faſhionable for a while, carried on by perplexed apartments, dark entries, and diſguiſed habits, are now juſtly condemned and laid aſide: for by ſuch conduct, the main uſe of Comedy was loſt. The attention of the Spectators, inſtead of being directed towards any diſplay of characters, was fixed upon the ſurpriſing turns and revolutions of the intrigue; and Comedy was changed into a mere Novel.

In the management of Characters, one of the moſt common faults of Comic Writers, is the carrying of them too far beyond life. Wherever ridicule is concerned, it is indeed extremely difficult to hit the preciſe point where true wit ends, and buffoonery begins. When the Miſer, for inſtance, in Plautus, ſearching the perſon whom he ſuſpects for having ſtolen his caſket, after examining firſt his right hand, and then his left, cries out, "oſtende etiam tertiam," "ſhow me your "third hand" (a ſtroke too which Moliere has

LECT. XLVII.

has copied from him), there is no one but muſt be ſenſible of the extravagance. Certain degrees of exaggeration are allowed to the Comedian; but there are limits ſet to it by nature and good taſte; and ſuppoſing the Miſer to be ever ſo much engroſſed by his jealouſy and his ſuſpicions, it is impoſſible to conceive any man in his wits ſuſpecting another of having more than two hands.

CHARACTERS in Comedy ought to be clearly diſtinguiſhed from one another; but the artificial contraſting of Characters, and the introducing them always in pairs, and by oppoſites, give too theatrical and affected an air to the Piece. This is become too common a reſource of Comic Writers, in order to heighten their Characters, and diſplay them to more advantage. As ſoon as the violent and impatient perſon arrives upon the Stage, the Spectator knows that, in the next ſcene, he is to be contraſted with the mild and good-natured man; or if one of the lovers introduced be remarkably gay and airy, we are ſure that his companion is to be a grave and ſerious lover; like Frankly and Bellamy, Clarinda and Jacintha, in Dr. Hoadly's Suſpicious Huſband. Such productions of Characters by pairs, is like the employment of the figure Antitheſis in diſcourſe, which, as I formerly obſerved, gives brilliancy indeed upon occaſions,

LECT. XLVII.

caſions, but is too apparently a rhetorical artifice. In every ſort of Compoſition, the perfection of art is to conceal art. A maſterly Writer will therefore give us his characters, diſtinguiſhed rather by ſuch ſhades of diverſity as are commonly found in Society, than marked with ſuch ſtrong oppoſitions, as are rarely brought into actual contraſt, in any of the circumſtances of life.

The Style of Comedy ought to be pure, elegant, and lively, very ſeldom riſing higher than the ordinary tone of polite converſation; and, upon no occaſion, deſcending into vulgar, mean, and groſs expreſſions. Here the French rhyme, which in many of their Comedies they have preſerved, occurs as an unnatural bondage. Certainly, if Proſe belongs to any Compoſition whatever, it is to that which imitates the converſation of men in ordinary life. One of the moſt difficult circumſtances in writing Comedy, and one too, upon which the ſucceſs of it very much depends, is to maintain, throughout, a current of eaſy, genteel, unaffected dialogue, without pertneſs and flippancy; without too much ſtudied and unſeaſonable wit; without dullneſs and formality. Too few of our Engliſh Comedies are diſtinguiſhed for this happy turn of converſation; moſt of them are liable to one or other of the exceptions I have mentioned. The Careleſs Huſband

LECT. XLVII.

Huſband, and, perhaps, we may add the Provoked Huſband, and the Suſpicious Huſband, ſeem to have more merit than moſt of them, for eaſy and natural dialogue.

THESE are the chief obſervations that occur to me, concerning the general principles of this ſpecies of Dramatic Writing, as diſtinguiſhed from Tragedy. But its nature and ſpirit will be ſtill better underſtood, by a ſhort hiſtory of its progreſs; and a view of the manner in which it has been carried on by Authors of different nations.

TRAGEDY is generally ſuppoſed to have been more antient among the Greeks than Comedy. We have fewer lights concerning the origin and progreſs of the latter. What is moſt probable, is, that, like the other, it took its riſe accidentally from the diverſions peculiar to the feaſt of Bacchus, and from Theſpis and his Cart; till, by degrees, it diverged into an entertainment of a quite different nature from ſolemn and heroic Tragedy. Critics diſtinguiſh three ſtages of Comedy among the Greeks; which they call the Antient, the Middle, and the New.

THE Antient Comedy conſiſted in direct and avowed ſatire againſt particular known perſons, who were brought upon the Stage by name,

LECT. XLVII.

name. Of this nature are the Plays of Ariſtophanes, eleven of which are ſtill extant; Plays of a very ſingular nature, and wholly different from all Compoſitions which have, ſince that age, born the name of Comedy. They ſhow what a turbulent and licentious Republic that of Athens was, and what unreſtrained ſcope the Athenians gave to ridicule, when they could ſuffer the moſt illuſtrious perſonages of their ſtate, their generals, and their magiſtrates, Cleon, Lamachus, Nicias, Alcibiades, not to mention Socrates the Philoſopher, and Euripides the Poet, to be publicly made the ſubject of Comedy. Several of Ariſtophanes's Plays are wholly political ſatires upon public management, and the conduct of generals and ſtateſmen, during the Peloponneſian war. They are ſo full of political allegories and alluſions, that it is impoſſible to underſtand them without a conſiderable knowledge of the hiſtory of thoſe times. They abound too with Parodies of the great Tragic Poets, particularly of Euripides; to whom the Author bore much enmity, and has written two Comedies, almoſt wholly in order to ridicule him.

Vivacity, Satire, and Buffoonery, are the characteriſtics of Ariſtophanes. Genius and force he diſplays upon many occaſions; but his performances, upon the whole, are not calculated to give us any high opinion of the Attic

LECT. XLVII.

taſte of wit, in his age. They ſeem, indeed, to have been compoſed for the mob. The ridicule employed in them is extravagant; the wit for the moſt part, buffooniſh and farcical; the perſonol raillery, biting and cruel; and the obſcenity that reigns in them, is groſs and intolerable. The treatment given by this Comedian, to Socrates the Philoſopher, in his Play of "The Clouds," is well known; but however it might tend to diſparage Socrates in the public eſteem, P. Brumoy, in his Theatre Grec, makes it appear, that it could not have been, as is commonly ſuppoſed, the cauſe of decreeing the death of that Philoſopher, which did not happen till twenty-three years after the repreſentation of Ariſtophanes's Clouds. There is a Chorus in Ariſtophanes's Plays; but altogether of an irregular kind. It is partly ſerious, partly comic; ſometimes mingles in the Action, ſometimes addreſſes the Spectators, defends the Author, and attacks his enemies.

Soon after the days of Ariſtophanes, the liberty of attacking perſons on the Stage by name, being found of dangerous conſequence to the public peace, was prohibited by law. The Chorus alſo, was, at this period, baniſhed from the Comic Theatre, as having been an inſtrument of too much licence and abuſe. Then, what is called the Middle Comedy,

took riſe; which was no other than an eluſion of the law. Fictitious names, indeed, were employed; but living perſons were ſtill attacked, and deſcribed in ſuch a manner as to be ſufficiently known. Of theſe Comic Pieces, we have no remains. To them ſucceeded the New Comedy; when the Stage being obliged to deſiſt wholly from perſonal ridicule, became, what it is now, the picture of manners and characters, but not of particular perſons. Menander was the moſt diſtinguiſhed Author of this kind, among the Greeks; and both from the imitations of him by Terence, and the account given of him by Plutarch, we have much reaſon to regret that his writings have periſhed; as he appears to have reformed, in a very high degree, the public taſte, and to have ſet the model of correct, elegant, and moral Comedy.

The only remains which we now have of the New Comedy, among the Antients, are the Plays of Plautus and Terence; both of whom were formed upon the Greek Writers. Plautus is diſtinguiſhed for very expreſſive language, and a great degree of the Vis Comica. As he wrote in an early period, he bears ſeveral marks of the rudeneſs of the Dramatic Art, among the Romans, in his time. He opens his Plays with Prologues, which ſometimes pre-occupy the ſubject of the whole Piece.

The

LECT. XLVII.

The repreſentation too, and the action of the Comedy, are ſometimes confounded; the Actor departing from his character, and addreſſing the Audience. There is too much low wit and ſcurrility in Plautus; too much of quaint conceit, and play upon words. But withal, he diſplays more variety, and more force than Terence. His characters are always ſtrongly marked, though ſometimes coarſely. His Amphytrion has been copied both by Moliere and by Dryden; and his Miſer alſo (in the Aulularia), is the foundation of a capital Play of Moliere's, which has been once and again imitated on the Engliſh Stage. Than Terence, nothing can be more delicate, more poliſhed and elegant. His Style is a model of the pureſt and moſt graceful Latinity. His dialogue is always decent and correct; and he poſſeſſes, beyond moſt Writers, the art of relating with that beautiful pictureſque ſimplicity, which never fails to pleaſe. His morality is, in general, unexceptionable. The ſituations which he introduces, are often tender and intereſting; and many of his ſentiments touch the heart. Hence, he may be conſidered as the founder of that ſerious Comedy, which has, of late years, been revived, and of which I ſhall have occaſion afterwards to ſpeak. If he fails in any thing, it is in ſprightlineſs and ſtrength. Both in his Characters, and in his Plots, there is too much ſameneſs and uniformity

formity throughout all his Plays; he copied Menander, and is ſaid not to have equalled him*. In order to form a perfect Comic Author, an union would be requiſite of the ſpirit and fire of Plautus, with the grace and correctneſs of Terence.

When we enter on the view of Modern Comedy, one of the firſt objects which preſents itſelf, is, the Spaniſh Theatre, which has been remarkably fertile in Dramatic Productions. Lopez de Vega, Guillin, and Calderon, are the chief Spaniſh Comedians. Lopez de Vega, who is by much the moſt famous of them, is ſaid to have written above a thouſand Plays; but our ſurpriſe at the number of his Productions will be diminiſhed, by being informed of their nature. From the account which M. Perron de Caſtera, a French Writer, gives of them, it would ſeem, that our Shakeſpeare is perfectly a regular and methodical Author, in compariſon of Lopez. He throws aſide all regard to the Three Unities,

* Julius Cæſar has given us his opinion of Terence, in the following lines, which are preſerved in the life of Terence, aſcribed to Suetonius:

Tu quoque, tu in ſummis, ô dimidiate Menander,
Poneris, et merito, puri ſermonis amator;
Lenibus atque utinam ſcriptis adjuncta foret vis
Comica, ut æquato virtus polleret honore
Cum Græcis, neque in hac deſpectus parte jaceres;
Unum hoc maceror, et doleo tibi deeſſe, Terenti.

LECT. XLVII.

or to any of the eſtabliſhed forms of Dramatic Writing. One Play often includes many years, nay, the whole life of a man. The Scene, during the firſt Act, is laid in Spain, the next in Italy, and the third in Africa. His Plays are moſtly of the hiſtorical kind, founded on the annals of the country; and they are, generally, a ſort of Tragi-comedies; or a mixture of Heroic Speeches, Serious Incidents, War and Slaughter, with much Ridicule and Buffoonery. Angels and Gods, Virtues and Vices, Chriſtian Religion and Pagan Mythology, are all frequently jumbled together. In ſhort, they are Plays like no other Dramatic Compoſitions; full of the romantic and extravagant. At the ſame time, it is generally admitted, that in the Works of Lopez de Vega, there are frequent marks of genius, and much force of imagination; many well-drawn characters, many happy ſituations; many ſtriking and intereſting ſurpriſes; and, from the ſource of his rich invention, the Dramatic Writers of other countries are ſaid to have frequently drawn their materials. He himſelf apologiſes for the extreme irregularity of his Compoſition, from the prevailing taſte of his countrymen, who delighted in a variety of events, in ſtrange and ſurpriſing adventures, and a labyrinth of intrigues, much more than in a natural and regularly conducted Story.

LECT. XLVII.

THE general characters of the French Comic Theatre are, that it is correct, chaſte, and decent. Several Writers of conſiderable note it has produced, ſuch as Regnard, Dufreſny, Dancourt, and Marivaux; but the Dramatic Author in whom the French glory moſt, and whom they juſtly place at the head of all their Comedians, is the famous Moliere. There is, indeed, no Author, in all the fruitful and diſtinguiſhed age of Louis XIV. who has attained a higher reputation than Moliere; or who has more nearly reached the ſummit of perfection in his own art, according to the judgment of all the French Critics. Voltaire boldly pronounces him to be the moſt eminent Comic Poet of any age or country; nor, perhaps, is this the deciſion of mere partiality; for taking him upon the whole, I know none who deſerves to be preferred to him. Moliere is always the Satiriſt only of vice or folly. He has ſelected a great variety of ridiculous characters peculiar to the times in which he lived, and he has generally placed the ridicule juſtly. He poſſeſſed ſtrong Comic powers; he is full of mirth and pleaſantry; and his pleaſantry is always innocent. His Comedies in Verſe, ſuch as the Miſanthrope and Tartuffe, are a kind of dignified Comedy, in which vice is expoſed, in the ſtyle of elegant and polite Satire. In his Proſe Comedies, though there is abundance of ridicule, yet there is never any

LECT. XLVII.

thing found to offend a modeſt ear, or to throw contempt on ſobriety and virtue. Together with thoſe high qualities, Moliere has alſo ſome defects, which Voltaire, though his profeſſed Panegyriſt, candidly admits. He is acknowledged not to be happy in the unravelling of his Plots. Attentive more to the ſtrong exhibition of characters, than to the conduct of the intrigue, his unravelling is frequently brought on with too little preparation, and in an improbable manner. In his Verſe Comedies, he is ſometimes not ſufficiently intereſting, and too full of long ſpeeches; and in his more riſible pieces in Proſe, he is cenſured for being too farcical. Few Writers, however, if any, ever poſſeſſed the ſpirit, or attained the true end of Comedy, ſo perfectly, upon the whole, as Moliere. His *Tartuffe*, in the ſtyle of Grave Comedy, and his *Avare*, in the Gay, are accounted his two capital productions.

From the Engliſh Theatre, we are naturally led to expect a greater variety of original characters in Comedy, and bolder ſtrokes of wit and humour, than are to be found on any other Modern Stage. Humour is, in a great meaſure, the peculiar province of the Engliſh nation. The nature of ſuch a free Government as ours; and that unreſtrained liberty which our manners allow to every man, of living

living entirely after his own taſte, afford full ſcope to the diſplay of ſingularity of character, and to the indulgence of humour in all its forms. Whereas, in France, the influence of a deſpotic court, the more eſtabliſhed ſubordination of ranks, and the univerſal obſervance of the forms of politeneſs and decorum, ſpread a much greater uniformity over the outward behaviour and characters of men. Hence Comedy has a more ample field, and can flow with a much freer vein in Britain, than in France. But it is extremely unfortunate, that, together with the freedom and boldneſs of the Comic ſpirit in Britain, there ſhould have been joined ſuch a ſpirit of indecency and licentiouſneſs, as has diſgraced Engliſh Comedy beyond that of any nation, ſince the days of Ariſtophanes.

The firſt age, however, of Engliſh Comedy, was not infected by this ſpirit. Neither the Plays of Shakeſpeare, nor thoſe of Ben Johnſon, can be accuſed of immoral tendency. Shakeſpeare's general character, which I gave in the laſt Lecture, appears with as great advantage in his Comedies, as in his Tragedies; a ſtrong, fertile, and creative genius, irregular in conduct, employed too often in amuſing the mob, but ſingularly rich and happy in the deſcription of characters and manners. Johnſon is more regular in the conduct of his pieces,

LECT. XLVII.

but ſtiff and pedantic; though not deſtitute of Dramatic Genius. In the Plays of Beaumont and Fletcher, much fancy and invention appear, and ſeveral beautiful paſſages may be found. But, in general, they abound with romantic and improbable incidents, with overcharged and unnatural characters, and with coarſe and groſs alluſions. Theſe Comedies of the laſt age, by the change of public manners, and of the turn of converſation, ſince their time, are now become too obſolete to be very agreeable. For we muſt obſerve, that Comedy depending much on the prevailing modes of external behaviour, becomes ſooner antiquated than any other ſpecies of Writing; and, when antiquated, it ſeems harſh to us, and loſes its power of pleaſing. This is eſpecially the caſe with reſpect to the Comedies of our own country, where the change of manners is more ſenſible and ſtriking, than in any foreign production. In our own country, the preſent mode of behaviour is always the ſtandard of politeneſs; and whatever departs from it appears uncouth; whereas in the Writings of foreigners, we are leſs acquainted with any ſtandard of this kind, and of courſe, are leſs hurt by the want of it. Plautus appeared more antiquated to the Romans, in the age of Auguſtus, than he does now to us. It is a high proof of Shakeſpeare's uncommon genius, that, notwithſtanding theſe diſadvantages,

tages, his character of Falſtaff is to this day admired, and his "Merry Wives of Windſor" read with pleaſure.

It was not till the æra of the Reſtoration of King Charles II. that the licentiouſneſs which was obſerved, at that period, to infect the court, and the nation in general, ſeized, in a peculiar manner, upon Comedy as its province, and, for almoſt a whole century, retained poſſeſſion of it. It was then firſt, that the Rake became the predominant character, and, with ſome exceptions, the Hero of every Comedy. The ridicule was thrown, not upon vice and folly, but much more commonly upon chaſtity and ſobriety. At the end of the Play, indeed, the Rake is commonly, in appearance, reformed, and profeſſes that he is to become a ſober man; but throughout the play, he is ſet up as the model of a fine gentleman; and the agreeable impreſſion made by a ſort of ſprightly licentiouſneſs, is left upon the imagination, as a picture of the pleaſurable enjoyment of life; while the reformation paſſes ſlightly away, as a matter of mere form. To what ſort of moral conduct ſuch public entertainments as theſe tend to form the youth of both ſexes, may be eaſily imagined. Yet this has been the ſpirit which has prevailed upon the Comic Stage of Great Britain, not only during the reign of

LECT. XLVII.

Charles II. but throughout the reigns of King William and Queen Anne, and down to the days of King George II.

DRYDEN was the firſt conſiderable Dramatic Writer after the Reſtoration; in whoſe Comedies, as in all his works, there are found many ſtrokes of genius, mixed with great careleſſneſs, and viſible marks of haſty compoſition. As he ſought to pleaſe only, he went along with the manners of the times; and has carried through all his Comedies that vein of diſſolute licentiouſneſs, which was then faſhionable. In ſome of them, the indecency was ſo groſs as to occaſion, even in that age, a prohibition of being brought upon the Stage *.

SINCE his time, the Writers of Comedy, of greateſt note, have been Cibber, Vanburgh, Farquhar, and Congreve. Cibber has written a great many Comedies; and though, in ſeveral of them, there be much ſprightlineſs, and

* "The mirth which he excites in Comedy will, perhaps, be found not ſo much to ariſe from any original humour, or peculiarity of character, nicely diſtinguiſhed, and diligently purſued, as from incidents and circumſtances, artifices and ſurpriſes, from jeſts of action, rather than ſentiment. What he had of humourous or paſſionate, he ſeems to have had, not from nature, but from other Poets; if not always a plagiary, yet, at leaſt, an imitator." JOHNSON's Life of Dryden.

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a certain pert vivacity peculiar to him, yet they are ſo forced and unnatural in the incidents, as to have generally ſunk into obſcurity, except two, which have always continued in high favour with the Public, "The Careleſs "Huſband," and "The Provoked Huſband." The former is remarkable for the polite and eaſy turn of the dialogue; and, with the exception of one indelicate Scene, is tolerably moral too in the conduct, and in the tendency. The latter, the "Provoked Huſband," (which was the joint production of Vanburgh and Cibber) is, perhaps, on the whole, the beſt Comedy in the Engliſh Language. It is liable, indeed, to one critical objection of having a double Plot; as the incidents of the Wrong-head family, and thoſe of Lord Townly's, are ſeparate, and independent of each other. But this irregularity is compenſated by the natural characters, the fine painting, and the happy ſtrokes of humour with which it abounds. We are, indeed, ſurpriſed to find ſo unexceptionable a Comedy proceeding from two ſuch looſe Authors; for, in its general ſtrain, it is calculated to expoſe licentiouſneſs and folly; and would do honour to any Stage.

Sir John Vanburgh has ſpirit, wit, and eaſe; but he is, to the laſt degree, groſs and indelicate. He is one of the moſt immoral of all

LECT. XLVII.

all our Comedians. His "Provok'd Wife," is full of ſuch indecent ſentiments and alluſions, as ought to explode it out of all reputable ſociety. His "Relapſe," is equally cenſurable; and theſe are his only two conſiderable Pieces. Congreve is, unqueſtionably, a Writer of genius. He is lively, witty, and ſparkling; full of character, and full of action. His chief fault as a Comic Writer is, that he overflows with wit. It is often introduced unſeaſonably; and, almoſt every where, there is too great a proportion of it for natural well-bred converſation *. Farquhar is a light and gay Writer; leſs correct, and leſs ſparkling than Congreve; but he has more eaſe, and, perhaps, fully as great a ſhare of the Vis Comica. The two beſt, and leaſt exceptionable of his Plays, are the "Recruiting Officer," and the "Beaux Stratagem." I ſay the leaſt exceptionable; for, in general, the tendency of both Congreve and Farquhar's Plays is immoral. Throughout them all, the Rake, the looſe intrigue, and the life of licentiouſneſs, are the objects continually held up to view; as if the aſſemblies of a great and poliſhed nation could be amuſed with none but vicious

* Dr. Johnſon, ſays of him, in his life, that "his perſonages are a kind of intellectual Gladiators; every ſentence is to ward, or to ſtrike; the conteſt of ſmartneſs is never intermitted; his wit is a meteor, playing to and fro, with alternate corruſcations."

objects. The indelicacy of these Writers, in the female characters which they introduce, is particularly remarkable. Nothing can be more awkward than their representations of a woman of virtue and honour. Indeed, there are hardly any female characters in their Plays except two; women of loose principles, or when a virtuous character is attempted to be drawn, women of affected manners.

The censure which I have now passed upon these celebrated Comedians, is far from being overstrained or severe. Accustomed to the indelicacy of our own Comedy, and amused with the wit and humour of it, its immorality too easily escapes our observation. But all foreigners, the French especially, who are accustomed to a better regulated and more decent Stage, speak of it with surprise and astonishment. Voltaire, who is, assuredly, none of the most austere moralists, plumes himself not a little upon the superior *bienseance* of the French Theatre; and says, that the language of English Comedy is the language of debauchery, not of politeness. M. Moralt, in his Letters upon the French and English Nations, ascribes the corruption of manners in London to Comedy, as its chief cause. Their Comedy, he says, is like that of no other country; it is the school in which the youth of

LECT. XLVII.

of both ſexes familiariſe themſelves with vice, which is never repreſented there as vice, but as mere gaiety. As for Comedies, ſays the ingenious M. Diderot, in his obſervations upon Dramatic Poetry, the Engliſh have none; they have, in their place, ſatires, full, indeed, of gaiety and force, but without morals, and without taſte; *ſans mœurs et ſans gout*. There is no wonder, therefore, that Lord Kaims, in his Elements of Criticiſm, ſhould have expreſſed himſelf, upon this ſubject, of the indelicacy of Engliſh Comedy, in terms much ſtronger than any that I have uſed; concluding his invective againſt it in theſe words: "How odious ought thoſe Writers to "be, who thus ſpread infection through their "native country; employing the talents which "they have received from their Maker moſt "traiterouſly againſt Himſelf, by endeavour-"ing to corrupt and diſfigure his creatures. "If the Comedies of Congreve did not rack "him with remorſe in his laſt moments, he "muſt have been loſt to all ſenſe of virtue." Vol. II. 479.

I AM happy, however, to have it in my power to obſerve, that, of late years, a ſenſible reformation has begun to take place in Engliſh Comedy. We have, at laſt, become aſhamed of making our public entertainments

reſt

reſt wholly upon profligate characters and ſcenes; and our later Comedies, of any reputation, are much purified from the licentiouſneſs of former times. If they have not the ſpirit, the eaſe, and the wit of Congreve and Farquhar, in which reſpect they muſt be confeſſed to be ſomewhat deficient; this praiſe, however, they juſtly merit, of being innocent and moral.

For this reformation, we are, queſtionleſs, much indebted to the French Theatre, which has not only been, at all times, more chaſte and inoffenſive than ours, but has, within theſe few years, produced a ſpecies of Comedy, of ſtill a graver turn than any that I have yet mentioned. This, which is called the Serious, or Tender Comedy, and was termed by its oppoſers, *La Comedie Larmoyante*, is not altogether a modern invention. Several of Terence's Plays, as the Andria, in particular, partake of this character; and as we know that Terence copied Menander, we have ſufficient reaſon to believe that his Comedies, alſo, were of the ſame kind. The nature of this Compoſition, does not by any means exclude gaiety and ridicule; but it lays the chief ſtreſs upon tender and intereſting ſituations; it aims at being ſentimental, and touching the heart by means of the capital incidents; it makes our pleaſure ariſe, not ſo much from the laughter

LECT. XLVII.

which it excites, as from the tears of affection and joy which it draws forth.

In Engliſh, Steele's Conſcious Lovers is a Comedy which approaches to this character, and it has always been favourably received by the Public. In French, there are ſeveral Dramatic Compoſitions of this kind, which poſſeſs conſiderable merit and reputation; ſuch as the "Melanide," and "Prejugé à la "Mode," of La Chauſſée; the "Père de "Famille," of Diderot; the "Cénie" of Mad. Graffigny; and the "Nanine," and "L'Enfant Prodigue," of Voltaire.

When this form of Comedy firſt appeared in France, it excited a great controverſy among the Critics. It was objected to, as a dangerous and unjuſtifiable innovation in Compoſition. It is not Comedy, ſaid they, for it is not founded on laughter and ridicule. It is not Tragedy, for it does not involve us in ſorrow. By what name then can it be called? or what pretenſions hath it to be comprehended under Dramatic Writing? But this was trifling, in the moſt egregious manner, with critical names and diſtinctions, as if theſe had invariably fixed the eſſence, and aſcertained the limits, of every ſort of Compoſition. Aſſuredly, it is not neceſſary that all Comedies ſhould be formed

formed on one preciſe model. Some may be entirely light and gay; others may be more ſerious; ſome may be of a mixed nature; and all of them, properly executed, may furniſh agreeable and uſeful entertainment to the Public, by ſuiting the different taſtes of men *. Serious and tender Comedy has no title to claim to itſelf the poſſeſſion of the ſtage, to the excluſion of ridicule and gaiety. But when it retains only its proper place, without uſurping the province of any other; when it is carried on with reſemblance to real life, and without introducing romantic and unnatural ſituations, it may certainly prove both an intereſting and an agreeable ſpecies of Dramatic Writing. If it become inſipid and drawling, this muſt be imputed to the fault of the Author, not to the nature of the Compoſition, which may admit much livelineſs and vivacity.

In general, whatever form Comedy aſſumes, whether gay or ſerious, it may always be eſteemed a mark of Society advancing in true politeneſs, when thoſe theatrical exhibitions, which are deſigned for public amuſement, are

* "Il y a beaucoup de très bonnes pièces, où il ne regne "que de la gayeté; d'autres toutes ſerieuſes; d'autres me-"langées; d'autres, où l'attendriſſement va juſq'aux "larmes. Il ne faut donner excluſion à aucune genre; & "ſi l'on me demandoit, quel genre eſt le meilleur? Je "repondrois, celui qui eſt le mieux traité." VOLTAIRE.

cleared

LECT. XLVII.

cleared from indelicate ſentiment, or immoral tendency. Though the licentious buffoonery of Ariſtophanes amuſed the Greeks for a while, they advanced, by degrees, to a chaſter and juſter taſte; and the like progreſs of refinement may be concluded to take place among us, when the Public receive with favour, Dramatic Compoſitions of ſuch a ſtrain and ſpirit, as entertained the Greeks and Romans, in the days of Menander and Terence.

INDEX.

8 JY69

INDEX

TO THE

THREE VOLUMES.

☞ *The* Numeral Letters *refer to the* Volume; *and the* Figures *to the* Pages.

A

ACCENTS, thrown farther back from the termination in the Engliſh than in any other language, i. 224. Seldom more than one in Engliſh words, ii. 435. Govern the meaſure of Engliſh verſe, iii. 104.

Achilles, his character in the Iliad, examined, iii. 240.

Action, much uſed to aſſiſt language in an imperfect ſtate, i. 134. And by antient orators and players, 138. Fundamental rule of propriety in, ii. 452. Cautions with reſpect to, 453. In epic poetry, the requiſites of, iii. 210.

Acts, the diviſion of a play into five, an arbitrary limitation, iii. 308. Theſe pauſes in repreſentation ought to fall properly, 309.

Adam, his character in Milton's Paradiſe Loſt, iii. 287.

Addiſon, general view of his Eſſay on the Pleaſures of the Imagination, i. 55. His invocation of the muſe in his Campaign, cenſured, 97. Blemiſhes in his ſtyle, 265. 268. 287. Eaſe and perſpicuity of, 295. 298. 303. His beautiful deſcription of light and colours, 365. Inſtance of his uſe of mixed metaphor, 390. Improper uſe of ſimilies, 436. His general character as a writer, ii. 41. Character of his Spectator, 59. Critical examination of ſome of thoſe papers, 61. Remarks on his criticiſm of Taſſo's Aminta, iii. 134. *note*. His tragedy of Cato critically examined, 305. 321. 331. 336.

INDEX.

Adjectives, common to all languages, i. 198. How they came to be claſſed with nouns, *ibid.*

Adverbs, their nature and uſe defined, i. 210. Importance of their poſition in a ſentence illuſtrated, 265.

Æneid of Virgil, critical examination of that poem, iii. 249. The ſubject, 250. Action, 251. Is deficient in characters, *ibid.* Diſtribution and management of the ſubject, 253. Abounds with awful and tender ſcenes, 255. The deſcent of Æneas into hell, 256. The poem left unfiniſhed by Virgil, 254. 258.

Æſchines, a compariſon between him and Demoſthenes, ii. 198.

Æſchylus, his character as a tragic writer, iii. 340.

Ætna, remarks on Virgil's deſcription of that mountain, i. 91. And on that by Sir Richard Blackmore, 93.

Affectation, the diſadvantages of, in public ſpeaking, ii. 455.

Ages, four, peculiarly fruitful in learned men, pointed out, iii. 3.

Akenſide, his compariſon between ſublimity in natural and moral objects, i. 68. *note.* Inſtance of his happy alluſion to figures, 364. Character of his Pleaſures of the Imagination, iii. 152.

Alphabet of letters, the conſiderations which led to the invention of, i. 165. Remote obſcurity of this invention, 167. The alphabets of different nations derived from one common ſource, 168.

Allegory, explained, i. 396. Antiently a favourite method of conveying inſtructions, 398. Allegorical perſonages improper agents in epic poetry, iii. 228. 282.

Ambiguity in ſtyle, from whence it proceeds, i. 264.

Amplification in ſpeech, what, i. 454. Its principal inſtrument, *ibid.*

American languages, the figurative ſtyle of, i. 143. 358.

Anagnoriſis, in antient tragedy, explained, iii. 312.

Annals, and hiſtory, the diſtinction between, iii. 52.

Antients and moderns diſtinguiſhed, iii. 4. The merits of antient writers are now finally aſcertained, 5. The progreſs of knowledge favourable to the moderns, in forming a compariſon between them, 9. In philoſophy and hiſtory, 10. The efforts of genius greater among the antients, 11. A mediocrity of genius now more diffuſed, 14.

Antitheſis in language explained, i. 443. The too frequent uſe of, cenſured, 445.

Apoſtrophe, the nature of this figure explained, i. 424. Fine one from Cicero, ii. 242. *note.*

Arabian Nights Entertainments, a character of thoſe tales, iii. 77.

INDEX.

Arabian poetry, its character, iii. 95.
Arbuthnot, character of his epiſtolary writing, iii. 72.
Architecture, ſublimity in, whence it ariſes, i. 66. The ſources of beauty in, 111.
Arguments, the proper management of in a diſcourſe, ii. 398. Analytic and ſynthetic methods, 402. Arrangement of, 404. Are not to be too much multiplied, 409.
Arioſto, character of his Orlando Furioſo, iii. 79. 271.
Ariſtotle, his rules for dramatic and epic compoſition, whence derived, i. 47. His definition of a ſentence, 258. His extended ſenſe of the term metaphor, 374. Character of his ſtyle, ii. 13. 23. His inſtitutions of rhetoric, 193. His definition of tragedy conſidered, iii. 294. His obſervations on tragic characters, 325.
Ariſtophanes, character of his comedies, iii. 365.
Arithmetical figures, univerſal characters, i. 164.
Ark of the covenant, choral ſervice performed in the proceſſion of bringing it back to Mount Zion, iii. 181.
Armſtrong, character of his Art of preſerving Health, iii. 152.
Art, works of, conſidered as a ſource of beauty, i. 110.
Articles, in language, the uſe of, i. 180. Their importance in the Engliſh language illuſtrated, 181.
Articulation, clearneſs of, neceſſary in public ſpeaking, ii. 434.
Aſſociations, academical, recommended, ii. 475. Inſtructions for the regulation of, 476.
Athenians, antient, character of, ii. 184. Eloquence of, 185.
Atterbury, a more harmonious writer than Tillotſon, i. 333. Critical examination of one of his ſermons, ii. 333. His exordium to a 30th of January ſermon, 380.
Attici and Aſiani, parties at Rome, account of, ii. 207.
Authors, petty, why no friends to criticiſm, i. 48. Why the moſt antient afford the moſt ſtriking inſtances of ſublimity, 76. Muſt write with purity, to gain eſteem, 229.

B

Bacon, his obſervations on romances, iii. 75.
Ballads, have great influence over the manners of a people, iii. 74. Were the firſt vehicles of hiſtorical knowledge and inſtruction, 91.
Bar, the eloquence of, defined, ii. 176. Why more confined than the pleadings before antient tribunals, 225. Diſtinction between the motives of pleading at the bar, and ſpeaking in popular aſſemblies, 264. In what reſpects antient pleadings differ from thoſe of modern times, 266. Inſtructions for pleaders, 269. 392.

INDEX.

Bards, antient, the first founders of law and civilization, iii. 91.
Barrow, Dr. character of his style, ii. 18. Character of his sermons, 328.
Beaumont and Fletcher, their characters as dramatic poets, iii. 374.
Beauty, the emotion raised by, distinguished from that of sublimity, i. 101. Is a term of vague application, *ibid.* Colours, 103. Figure, 104. Hogarth's line of beauty, and line of grace, considered, 105. Motion, 106. A landscape the most complete assemblage of beautiful objects, 108. The human countenance, 109. Works of art, 110. The influence of fitness and design in our ideas of beauty, 111. Beauty in literary composition, 113. Novelty, 115. Imitation, *ibid.*
Bergerus, a German critic, writes a treatise on the sublimity of Cæsar's Commentaries, i. 73.
Berkeley, bishop, character of his Dialogues on the Existence of Matter, iii. 65.
Biography, as a class of historical composition, characterised, iii. 54.
Blackmore, Sir Richard, remarks on his description of Mount Ætna, i. 93.
Blackwall, his character as a writer, ii. 45.
Boileau, his character as a didactic poet, iii. 157.
Bolingbroke, instances of inaccuracy in his style, i. 281. 308. A beautiful climax from, 302. A beautiful metaphor from, 375. His general character as a politician and philosopher, 377. His general character as a writer, ii. 48. 472.
Bombast in writing described, i. 98.
Bossu, his definition of an epic poem, iii. 204. His account of the composition of the Iliad, 205.
Bossuet, M. instances of apostrophes to personified objects, in his funeral orations, i. 423. *note.* Conclusion of his funeral oration on the prince of Condé, ii. 426.
Britain, Great, not eminent for the study of eloquence, ii. 219. Compared with France in this respect, 221.
Bruyere, his parallel between the eloquence of the pulpit and the bar, ii. 301. *note.*
Buchanan, his character as an historian, iii. 50.
Building, how rendered sublime, i. 66.

C

Cadmus, account of his alphabet, i. 168.

INDEX.

Cæſar's Commentaries, the ſtyle of, characteriſed, i. 72. Is conſidered by Bergerus as a ſtandard of ſublime writing, 73. Inſtance of his happy talent in hiſtorical painting, iii. 42. *note*. His character of Terence the dramatiſt, 369. *note*.

Camoens, critical examination of his Luſiad, iii. 273. Confuſed machinery of, 274.

Campbell, Dr. his obſervations on Engliſh particles, i. 195. *note*.

Carmel, Mount, metaphorical alluſions to, in Hebrew poetry, iii. 187.

Caſimir, his character as a lyric poet, iii. 144.

Cataſtrophe, the proper conduct of, in dramatic repreſentations, iii. 311.

Caudine Forks, Livy's happy deſcription of the diſgrace of the Roman army there, iii. 39.

Celtic language, its antiquity and character, i. 214. The remains of it, where to be found, *ibid*. Poetry, its character, iii. 94.

Characters, the danger of labouring them too much in hiſtorical works, iii. 46. The due requiſites of, in tragedy, 323.

Chineſe language, character of, i. 136. And writing, 163.

Chivalry, origin of, iii. 77.

Chorus, antient, deſcribed, iii. 298. Was the origin of tragedy, 299. Inconveniencies of, 301. How it might properly be introduced on the modern theatre, 303.

Chronology, a due attention to, neceſſary in hiſtorical compoſitions, iii. 26.

Chryſoſtom, St. his oratorial character, ii. 217.

Cibber, his character as a dramatic writer, iii. 376.

Cicero, his ideas of taſte, i. 22. *note*. His diſtinction between *amare* and *diligere*, 247. His obſervation on ſtyle, 262. Very attentive to the beauties of climax, 301. Is the moſt harmonious of all writers, 316. His remarks on the power of muſic in orations, 322. His attention to harmony too viſible, 332. Inſtance of his happy talent of adapting ſound to ſenſe, 335. His account of the origin of figurative language, 356. His obſervations on ſuiting language to the ſubject, 380. His rule for the uſe of metaphor, 383. Inſtance of antitheſis in, 444. The figure of ſpeech called viſion, 452. His caution againſt beſtowing profuſe ornament on an oration, ii. 4. His diſtinctions of ſtyle, 10. His own character as a writer, 13. His character of the Grecian orators, 188. His own character as an orator, 205. Compared with Demoſthenes, 208. Maſterly apoſtrophe in, 242. *note*. His method of ſtudying the judicial cauſes he undertook to plead, 270. State of the proſecution of Avitus Cluentius, 280.

Analyſis of Cicero's oration for him, 281. The exordium to his ſecond oration againſt Rullus, 373. His method of preparing introductions to his orations, 376. Excelled in narration, 394. His defence of Milo, *ibid.* 407. Inſtance of the pathetic, in his laſt oration againſt Verres, 421. Character of his treatiſe *De Oratore*, 479. Character of his Dialogues, iii. 63. His Epiſtles, 70.

Clarendon, lord, remarks on his ſtyle, i. 277. His character as an hiſtorian, iii. 51.

Clarke, Dr. the ſtyle of his ſermons characteriſed, ii. 327.

Claſſics, antient, their merits now finally ſettled beyond controverſy, iii. 5. The ſtudy of them recommended, 16.

Climax, a great beauty in compoſition, i. 301. In what it conſiſts, 454.

Cluentius, Avitus, hiſtory of his proſecution, ii. 280. His cauſe undertaken by Cicero, *ibid.* Analyſis of Cicero's oration for him, 281.

Colours conſidered as the foundation of beauty, i. 103.

Comedy, how diſtinguiſhed from tragedy, iii. 291. 355. Rules for the conduct of, 357. The characters in, ought to be of our own country, and of our own time, 358. Two kinds of, 359. Characters ought to be diſtinguiſhed, 362. Style, 363. Riſe and progreſs of comedy, 364. Spaniſh comedy, 369. French comedy, 371. Engliſh comedy, 372. Licentiouſneſs of, from the æra of the reſtoration, 375. The reformation of, to what owing, 381. General remarks, 382.

Compariſon, diſtinguiſhed from metaphor, i. 372. The nature of this figure explained, 431.

Compoſition. See *Literary* compoſition.

Congreve, the plot of his Mourning Bride embarraſſed, iii. 307. General character of this tragedy, 353. His comedies, 378.

Conjugation of verbs, the varieties of, i. 203.

Conviction diſtinguiſhed from perſuaſion, ii. 174.

Copulatives, cautions for the uſe of them, i. 288.

Corneille, his character as a tragic writer, iii. 344.

Couplets, the firſt introduction of, into Engliſh poetry, iii. 112.

Cowley, inſtances of forced metaphors in his poems, i. 383. His uſe of ſimilies cenſured, 440. His general character as a poet, iii. 145.

Crevier, his character of ſeveral eminent French writers, ii. 470. *note*.

Criticiſm, true, and pedantic, diſtinguiſhed, i. 11. Its object, 46. Its origin, 47. Why complained of by petty authors, 48. May ſometimes decide againſt the voice of the public, 49.

Cyphers, or arithmetical figures, a kind of univerſal character, i. 164.

David,

INDEX.

D

David king, his magnificent inſtitutions for the cultivation of ſacred muſic and poetry, iii. 178. His character as a poet, 197.

Debate in popular aſſemblies, the eloquence of, defined, ii. 177. More particularly conſidered, 231. Rules for, 233.

Declamation, unſupported by ſound reaſoning, falſe eloquence, ii. 231.

Declenſion of nouns conſidered, in various languages, i. 188. Whether caſes or prepoſitions were moſt antiently uſed, 190. Which of them are moſt uſeful and beautiful, 193.

Deities, heathen, probable cauſe of the number of, i. 409.

Deliberative orations, what, ii. 228.

Delivery, the importance of, in public ſpeaking, ii. 246. 428. The four chief requiſites in, 431. The powers of voice, 432. Articulation, 434. Pronunciation, 435. Emphaſis, 437. Pauſes, 440. Declamatory delivery, 450. Action, 451. Affectation, 455.

Demetrius Phalerius, the rhetorician, his character, ii. 200.

Demonſtrative orations, what, ii. 228.

Demoſthenes, his eloquence characteriſed, ii. 186. His expedients to ſurmount the diſadvantages of his perſon and addreſs, 195. His oppoſition to Philip of Macedon, 196. His rivalſhip with Æſchines, 197. His ſtyle and action, 198. Compared with Cicero, 208. Why his orations ſtill pleaſe in peruſal, 232. Extracts from his Philippics, 249. His definition of the ſeveral points of oratory, 428.

Deſcription, the great teſt of a poet's imagination, iii. 158. Selection of circumſtances, 159. Inanimate objects ſhould be enlivened, 166. Choice of epithets, 170.

Deſcription and imitation, the diſtinction between, i. 119.

Des Broſſes, his ſpeculations on the expreſſive power of radical letters and ſyllables, i. 130. *note*.

Dialogue writing, the properties of, iii. 61. Is very difficult to execute, *ibid*. Modern dialogues characteriſed, 62.

Didactic poetry, its nature explained, iii. 146. The moſt celebrated productions in this claſs ſpecified, 147. Rules for compoſitions of this kind, *ibid*. Proper embelliſhments of, 150.

Diderot, M. his character of Engliſh comedy, iii. 380.

Dido, her character in the Ænied examined, iii. 253.

Dionyſius of Halicarnaſſus, his ideas of excellency in a ſentence, i. 318. His diſtinctions of ſtyle, ii. 10. Character of his treatiſe on Grecian oratory, 191. His compariſon between Lyſias and Iſocrates, 193. *note*. His criticiſm on Thucydides, iii. 25.

INDEX.

Diſcourſe. See *Oration.*

Dramatic poetry, the origin of, iii. 97, Diſtinguiſhed by its objects, 291. See *Tragedy* and *Comedy.*

Dryden, one of the firſt reformers of our ſtyle, ii. 21. Johnſon's character of his proſe ſtyle, *ibid. note.* His character as a poet, iii. 113. His character of Shakeſpeare, 349. *note.* His own character as a dramatic writer, 351. 376.

Du Bos, Abbé, his remark on the theatrical compoſitions of the antients, i. 320.

E

Education, liberal, an eſſential requiſite for eloquence, ii. 465.

Egypt, the ſtyle of the hieroglyphical writing of, i. 161. This an early ſtage of the art of writing, 162. The alphabet probably invented in that country, 167.

Emphaſis, its importance in public ſpeaking, ii. 437. Rule for, 439.

Eloquence, the ſeveral objects of conſideration under this head, ii. 171. Definition of the term, 172. Fundamental maxims of the art, 173. Defended againſt the objection of the abuſe of the art of perſuaſion, 175. Three kinds of eloquence diſtinguiſhed, 176. Oratory, the higheſt degree of, the offſpring of paſſion, 177. Requiſites for eloquence, 180. French eloquence, 181. Grecian, 185. Riſe and character of the rhetoricians of Greece, 189. Roman, 201. The Attici and Aſiani, 207. Compariſon between Cicero and Demoſthenes, 208. The ſchools of the declaimers, 215. The eloquence of the primitive fathers of the church, 217. General remarks on modern eloquence, 218. Parliament, 224. The bar, 225.; and pulpit, 226. The three kinds of orations diſtinguiſhed by the antients, 228. Theſe diſtinctions how far correſpondent with thoſe made at preſent, 229. Eloquence of popular aſſemblies conſidered, 230. The foundation of eloquence, 232. The danger of truſting to prepared ſpeeches at public meetings, 235. Neceſſary premeditation pointed out, 236. Method, 237. Style and expreſſion, 238. Impetuoſity, 241. Attention to decorums, 243. Delivery, 246. 428. Summary, 247. See *Cicero*, *Demoſthenes*, *Oration*, and *Pulpit.*

Engliſh language, the arrangement of words in, more refined than that of antient languages, i. 152. But more limited, 153. The principles of general grammar ſeldom applied to it, 174. The important uſe of articles in, 180. All ſubſtantive nouns of inanimate objects, of the neuter gender, 184. The place of declenſion in, ſupplied by prepoſitions, 190. The various tenſes of Engliſh verbs, 204. Hiſtorical view of the Engliſh language, 214. The Celtic the primitive

tive language of Britain, 215. The Teutonic tongue the baſis of our preſent ſpeech, 216. Its irregularities accounted for, 217. Its copiouſneſs, 218. Compared with the French language, 219. Its ſtyle characteriſed, 220. Its flexibility, 222. Is more harmonious than is generally allowed, 223. Is rather ſtrong than graceful, 224. Accent thrown farther back in Engliſh words, than in thoſe of any other language, *ibid.* General properties of the Engliſh tongue, 225. Why ſo looſely and inaccurately written, 226. The fundamental rules of ſyntax, common both to the Engliſh and Latin, 228. No author can gain eſteem if he does not write with purity, 229. Grammatical authors recommended, 230. *note.*

Epic poetry, the ſtandards of, iii. 15. Is the higheſt effort of poetical genius, 203. The characters of, obſcured by critics, 204. Examination of Boſſu's account of the formation of the Iliad, *ibid.* Epic poetry conſidered as to its moral tendency, 209. Predominant character of, 210. Action of, 211. Epiſodes, 213. The ſubject ſhould be of remote date, 217. Modern hiſtory more proper for dramatic writing than for epic poetry, 218. The ſtory muſt be intereſting and ſkilfully managed, 219. The intrigue, 220. The queſtion conſidered, whether it ought to end ſucceſsfully, *ibid.* Duration of the action, 221. Characters of the perſonages, 222. The principal hero, 223. The machinery, 224. Narration, 228. Looſe obſervations, 229.

Epiſode, defined with reference to epic poetry, ii. 213. Rules for conduct of, 214.

Epiſtolary writing, general remarks on, iii. 65.

Eve, her character in Milton's Paradiſe Loſt, iii. 287.

Euripides, inſtance of his excellence in the pathetic, iii. 334. *note.* His character as a tragic writer, 340.

Exclamations, the proper uſe of, i. 449. Mode of their operation, *ibid.* Rule for the employment of, 450.

Exerciſe improves both bodily and mental powers, i. 25.

Exordium of a diſcourſe, the objects of, ii. 371. Rules for the compoſition of, 375.

Explication of the ſubject of a ſermon, obſervation on, ii. 396.

F

Face, human, the beauty of, complex, i. 109.

Farquhar, his character as a dramatic writer, iii. 378.

Fathers, Latin, character of their ſtyle of eloquence, ii. 217.

Fenelon, archbiſhop, his parallel between Demoſthenes and Cicero, ii. 212. His remarks on the compoſition of a ſermon, 386. Critical examination of his Adventures of Telemachus, iii. 276.

Fielding, a character of his novels, iii. 82.

Figurative ſtyle of language defined, i. 343. Is not a ſcholaſtic invention, but a natural effuſion of imagination, 345. How deſcribed by rhetoricians, 346. Will not render a cold or empty compoſition intereſting, 350. The pathetic and ſublime reject figures of ſpeech, 351. Origin of, 352. How they contribute to the beauty of ſtyle, 359. Illuſtrate deſcription, 362. Heighten emotion, 363. The rhetorical names and claſſes of figures frivolous, 366. The beauties of compoſition not dependent on tropes and figures, ii. 2. Figures muſt always riſe naturally from the ſubject, *ibid.* Are not to be profuſely uſed, 4. The talent of uſing derived from nature, and not to be created, 6. If improperly introduced, are a deformity, *ibid. note.* See *Metaphor.*

Figure, conſidered as a ſource of beauty, i. 104.

Figures of ſpeech, the origin of, i. 141.

Figures of thought, among rhetoricians, defined, i. 347.

Fitneſs and deſign, conſidered as ſources of beauty, i. 111.

Fleece, a poem, harmonious paſſage from, i. 340.

Fontenelle, character of his Dialogues, iii. 64.

French, Norman, when introduced into England, i. 215.

French writers, general remarks on their ſtyle, ii. 16. Eloquence, 181. 218. French and Engliſh oratory compared, 221.

Frigidity in writing characteriſed, i. 97.

G

Gay, a character of his paſtorals, iii. 132.

Gender of nouns, foundation of, i. 182.

Genius diſtinguiſhed from taſte, i. 52. Its import, *ibid.* Includes taſte, 54. The pleaſures of the imagination, a ſtriking teſtimony of Divine benevolence, 57. True, is nurſed by liberty, ii. 180. In arts and writing, why diſplayed more in one age than in another, iii. 2. Was more vigorous in the antients than in the moderns, 11. A general mediocrity of, now diffuſed, 14.

Geſner, a character of his Idylls, iii. 131.

Geſtures, in public oratory. See *Action.*

Gil Blas, of Le Sage, character of that novel, iii. 81.

Girard, Abbé, character of his *Synonymes François*, i. 255. *note.*

Gordon, inſtances of his unnatural diſpoſition of words, i. 296.

Gorgius of Leontium, the rhetorician, his character, ii. 189.

Gothic poetry, its character, iii. 94.

Gracchus, C. his declamations regulated by muſical rules, i. 320.

Grammar, general, the principles of, little attended to by writers, i. 173. The diviſion of the ſeveral parts of ſpeech, 175. Nouns ſubſtantive, 176. Articles, 179. Number, gender,

gender, and caſe of nouns, 182. Prepoſitions, 190. Pronouns, 196. Adjectives, 198. Verbs, 201. Verbs, the moſt artificial and complex of all the parts of ſpeech, 206. Adverbs, 210. Prepoſitions and conjunctions, 211. Importance of the ſtudy of grammar, 212.

Grandeur. See *Sublimity.*

Greece, ſhort account of the antient republics of, ii. 183. Eloquence carefully ſtudied there, 185. Characters of the diſtinguiſhed orators of, 187. Riſe and character of the rhetoricians, 189.

Greek, a muſical language, i. 137. 319. Its flexibility, 222. Writers, diſtinguiſhed for ſimplicity, ii. 37.

Guarini, character of his *Paſtor Fido,* iii. 133.

Guicciardini, his character as an hiſtorian, iii. 49.

H

Habakkuk, ſublime repreſentation of the Deity in, i. 78.

Harris, explanatory ſimile cited from, i. 433.

Hebrew Poetry, in what points of view to be conſidered, iii. 175. The antient pronunciation of, loſt, 177. Muſic and poetry early cultivated among the Hebrews, 178. Conſtruction of Hebrew Poetry, 179. Is diſtinguiſhed by a conciſe, ſtrong, figurative expreſſion, 183. The metaphors employed in, ſuggeſted by the climate and nature of the land of Judea, 185. 191. Bold and ſublime inſtances of perſonification in, 192. Book of Proverbs, 194. Lamentations of Jeremiah, 195. Book of Job, 199.

Helen, her character in the Iliad examined, iii. 239.

Hell, the various deſcents into, given by epic poets, ſhew the gradual improvement of notions concerning a future ſtate, iii. 278.

Henriade. See *Voltaire.*

Herodotus, his character as an hiſtorian, ii. 27.

Heroiſm, ſublime inſtances of, pointed out, i. 67.

Hervey, character of his ſtyle, ii. 30.

Hieroglyphics, the ſecond ſtage of the art of writing, i. 159. Of Egypt, 161.

Hiſtorians, modern, their advantages over the antient, iii. 10. Antient models of, 15. The objects of their duty, 18. Character of Polybius, 23. Of Thucydides, 24. Of Herodotus and Thuanus, 27. Primary qualities neceſſary in a hiſtorian, 28. Character of Livy and Salluſt, 30. Of Tacitus, 32. Inſtructions and cautions to hiſtorians, *ibid.* How to preſerve the dignity of narration, 36. How to render it intereſting, 37. Danger of refining too much in drawing characters,

characters, 46. Character of the Italian hiſtorians, 48. The French and Engliſh, 50.

Hiſtory, the proper object and end of, iii. 18. True, the characters of, 19. The different claſſes of, 20. General Hiſtory, the proper conduct of, 21. The neceſſary qualities of hiſtorical narration, 25. The propriety of introducing orations in hiſtory examined, 44. And characters, 46. The Italians the beſt modern hiſtorians, 48. See *Annals*, *Biography*, *Memoirs*, and *Novels*.

Hogarth, his analyſis of beauty conſidered, i. 105.

Homer, not acquainted with poetry as a ſyſtematic art, i. 48. Did not poſſeſs a refined taſte, 54. Inſtances of ſublimity in, 79. Is remarkable for the uſe of perſonification, 415. Story of the Iliad, iii. 232. Remarks on, 233. His invention and judgment in the conduct of the poem, 236. Advantages and defects ariſing from his narrative ſpeeches, 238. His characters, 239. His machinery, 241. His ſtyle, 244. His ſkill in narrative deſcription, 245. His ſimilies, 246. General character of his Odyſſey, 248. Defects of the Odyſſey, 249. Compared with Virgil, 257.

Hooker, a ſpecimen of his ſtyle, ii. 20.

Horace, figurative paſſages cited from, i. 361. Inſtance of mixed metaphor in, 391. Crouded metaphors, 392. His character as a poet, iii. 16. 143. Was the reformer of ſatire, 153.

Humour, why the Engliſh poſſeſs this quality more eminently than other nations, ii. 372.

Hyperbole, an explanation of that figure, i. 400. Cautions for the uſe of, 402. Two kinds of, *ibid.*

I

Ideas, abſtract, entered into the firſt formation of language, i. 178.

Jeremiah, his poetical character, iii. 198. See *Lamentations*.

Iliad, ſtory of, iii. 232. Remarks on, 233. The principal characters, 239. Machinery of, 241.

Imagination, the pleaſures of, as ſpecified by Mr. Addiſon, i. 56. The powers of, to enlarge the ſphere of our pleaſures, a ſtriking inſtance of Divine benevolence, 57. Is the ſource of figurative language, 345. 354.

Imitation, conſidered as a ſource of pleaſure to taſte, i. 115. And deſcription, diſtinguiſhed, 119.

Inferences from a ſermon, the proper management of, ii. 425.

Infinity of ſpace, numbers, or duration, affect the mind with ſublime ideas, i. 60.

INDEX.

Interjections the firſt elements of ſpeech, i. 128.
Interrogation, inſtances of the happy uſe and effect of, i. 448. Mode of their operation, 449. Rule for uſing, *ibid.*
Job, exemplification of the ſublimity of obſcurity in the book of, i. 64. Remarks on the ſtyle of, iii. 177. The ſubject and poetry of, 199. Fine paſſage from, 201.
Johnſon, his character of Dryden's proſe ſtyle, ii. 21. *note.* His remarks on the ſtyle of Swift, 144. *note.* His character of Thomſon, iii. 162. *note.* His character of Dryden's comedies, 376. *note.* His character of Congreve, 376. *note.*
Johnſon, Ben, his character as a dramatic poet, iii. 373.
Iſæus, the rhetorician, his character, ii. 193.
Iſaiah, ſublime repreſentation of the Deity in, i. 78. His deſcription of the fall of the Aſſyrian empire, 427. His metaphors ſuited to the climate of Judea, iii. 186. 188, 189. His character as a poet, 198.
Iſocrates, the rhetorician, his character, ii. 190.
Judea, remarks on the climate and natural circumſtances of that country, iii. 185.
Judicial orations, what, ii. 228.
Juvenal, a character of his ſatires, iii. 153.

K

Kaims, lord, his ſevere cenſures of Engliſh comedies, iii. 380.
Knight errantry, foundation of the Romances concerning, iii. 77.
Knowledge an eſſential requiſite for eloquence, ii. 465. The progreſs of, in favour of the moderns, upon a compariſon with the antients, iii. 9. The acquiſition of, difficult in former ages, 12.

L

Lamentations of Jeremiah, the moſt perfect elegiac compoſition in the ſacred ſcriptures, iii. 195.
Landſcape conſidered as an aſſemblage of beautiful objects, i. 108.
Language, the improvement of, ſtudied even by rude nations, i. 2. In what the true improvement of language conſiſts, 3. Importance of the ſtudy of language, 5. Defined, 123. The preſent refinements of, 124. Origin and progreſs of, 126. The firſt elements of, 128. Analogy between words and things, 130. The great aſſiſtance afforded by geſtures, 134. The Chineſe language, 136. The Greek and Roman languages, 137. Action much uſed by antient orators and players, 138. Roman pantomimes, 139. Great difference between antient and modern pronunciation, 140. Figures of ſpeech, the origin of, 142. Figurative ſtyle of American Languages, 143. Cauſe of the decline of figurative

figurative language, 146. The natural and original arrangement of words in ſpeech, 149. The arrangement of words in modern languages, different from that of the antients, 152. An exemplification, *ibid.* Summary of the foregoing obſervations, 156. Its wonderful powers, 364. All language ſtrongly tinctured with metaphor, 373. In modern productions, often better than the ſubjects of them, ii. 169. Written and oral, diſtinction between, ii. 471. See *Grammar, Style, and Writing.*

Latin language, the pronunciation of, muſical and geſticulating, i. 137. 319. The natural arrangement of words in, 150. The want of articles a defect in, 180. Remarks on words deemed ſynonimous in, 247.

Learning, an eſſential requiſite for eloquence, ii. 465.

Lebanon, metaphorical alluſions to, in Hebrew poetry, iii. 187.

Lee, extravagant hyperbole quoted from, i. 404. His character as a tragic poet, iii. 351.

Liberty the nurſe of true genius, ii. 180.

Literary Compoſition, importance of the ſtudy of language, preparatory to, i. 6. The beauties of, indefinite, 113. To what claſs the pleaſures received from eloquence, poetry, and fine writing, are to be referred, 116. The beauties of, not dependent on tropes and figures, ii. 2. The different kinds of, diſtinguiſhed, iii. 18. See *Hiſtory, Poetry*, &c.

Livy, his character as an hiſtorian, iii. 30. 39.

Locke, general character of his ſtyle, ii. 26. The ſtyle of his Treatiſe on Human Underſtanding, compared with the writings of Lord Shafteſbury, iii. 60.

Longinus, ſtrictures on his Treatiſe on the Sublime, i. 74. His account of the conſequences of liberty, ii. 180. His ſententious opinion of Homer's Odyſſey, iii. 248.

Lopez de la Vega, his character as a dramatic poet, iii. 369.

Love, too much importance and frequency allowed to, on the modern ſtage, iii. 328.

Lowth's Engliſh Grammar recommended, i. 230. *note.* 289. *note.* His character of the prophet Ezekiel, iii. 198.

Lucan, inſtance of his deſtroying a ſublime expreſſion of Cæſar, by amplification, i. 84. Extravagant hyperbole from, 405. Critical examination of his Pharſalia, iii. 259. The ſubject, 260. Characters and conduct of the ſtory, 261.

Lucian, Character of his Dialogues, iii. 64.

Lucretius, his ſublime repreſentation of the dominion of ſuperſtition over mankind, i. 64. *note.* The moſt admired paſſages in his Treatiſe *De Rerum Natura*, iii. 150.

Luſiad. See *Camoens.*

Lyric poetry, the peculiar character of, iii. 137. Four claſſes of

of odes, 139. Characters of the moſt eminent lyric poets, 142.

Lyſias, the rhetorician, his character, ii. 193.

M

Machiavel, his character as an hiſtorian, iii. 48.

Machinery, the great uſe of, in epic poetry, iii. 224. Cautions for the uſe of, 227. 241.

Mackenzie, Sir George, inſtance of regular climax in his pleadings, i. 455.

Man, by nature both a poet and muſician, iii. 90.

Marivaux, a character of his novels, iii. 81.

Marmontel, his comparative remarks on French, Engliſh, and Italian poetry, iii. 109. *note.*

Marſy, Fr. his contraſt between the characters of Corneille and Racine, i. 346. *note.*

Maſſillon, extract from a celebrated ſermon of his, ii. 324. *note.* Encomium on, by Louis XIV. 331. His artful diviſion of a text, 391.

Memoirs, their claſs in hiſtorical compoſition aſſigned, iii. 52. Why the French are fond of this kind of writing, 53.

Metalepſis, in figurative language, explained, i. 369.

Metaphor, in figurative ſtyle, explained, i. 370. 372. All language ſtrongly tinctured with, 373. Approaches the neareſt to painting, of all the figures of ſpeech, 375. Rules to be obſerved in the conduct of, 378. See *Allegory*.

Metaſtaſio, his character as a dramatic writer, iii. 347.

Metonomy, in figurative ſtyle, explained, i. 374.

Mexico, hiſtorical pictures the records of that empire, i. 159.

Milo, narrative of the rencounter between him and Clodius, by Cicero, ii. 394.

Milton, inſtances of ſublimity in, i. 62. 87. 91. Of harmony, 316. 338. Hyperbolical ſentiments of Satan in, 403. Striking inſtances of perſonification in, 415, 416. 418. Excellence of his deſcriptive poetry, iii. 104. Who the proper hero of his Paradiſe Loſt, 224. Critical examination of this poem, 283. His ſublimity characteriſed, 288. His language and verſification, 289.

Moderns. See *Antients*.

Moliere, his character as a dramatic poet, iii. 371.

Monboddo, lord, his obſervations on Engliſh and Latin verſe, iii. 124. *note.*

Monotony in language, often the reſult of too great attention to muſical arrangement, i. 330.

Montague, lady Mary Wortley, a character of her epiſtolary ſtyle, iii. 74.

Monteſquieu, character of his ſtyle, ii. 13.
Monumental inſcriptions, the numbers ſuited to the ſtyle, i. 336.
Moralt, M. his ſevere cenſure of Engliſh comedy, iii. 379.
More, Dr. Henry, character of his Divine Dialogues, iii. 65.
Motion, conſidered as a ſource of beauty, i. 106.
Motte, M. de la, his obſervations on lyric poetry, iii. 141. *note.* Remarks on his criticiſm on Homer, 247. *note.*
Muſic, its influence on the paſſions, iii. 90. Its union with poetry, *ibid.* Their ſeparation injurious to each, 99.

N

Naïveté, import of that French term, ii. 37.
Narration, an important point in pleadings at the bar, ii. 392.
Night ſcenes, commonly ſublime, i. 62.
Nomic melody of the Athenians, what, i. 320.
Novels, a ſpecies of writing, not ſo inſignificant as may be imagined, iii. 74. Might be employed for very uſeful purpoſes, 75. Riſe and progreſs of fictitious hiſtory, 76. Characters of the moſt celebrated romances and novels, 79.
Novelty conſidered as a ſource of beauty, i. 115.
Nouns, ſubſtantives, the foundation of all grammar, i. 176. Number, gender, and caſes of, 182.

O

Obſcurity, not unfavouroble to ſublimity, i. 63. Of ſtyle, owing to indiſtinct conceptions, 234.
Ode, the nature of, defined, iii. 137. Four diſtinctions of, 139. Obſcurity and irregularity, the great faults in, 140.
Odyſſey, general character of, iii. 248. Defects of, 249.
Oedipus, an improper character for the ſtage, iii. 326.
Orators, antient, declaimed in recitative, i. 138.
Orations, the three kinds of, diſtinguiſhed by the antients, ii. 228. The preſent diſtinctions of, 229. Thoſe in popular aſſemblies conſidered, 230. Prepared ſpeeches not to be truſted to, 235. Neceſſary degrees of premeditation, 236. Method, 237. Style and expreſſion, 238. Impetuoſity, 240. Attention to decorums, 243. Delivery, 246. 428. The ſeveral parts of a regular oration, 370. Introduction, 371. Introduction to replies, 383. Introduction to ſermons, 384. Diviſion of a diſcourſe, 386. Rules for dividing it, 389. Explication, 391. The argumentative part, 398. The pathetic, 410. The peroration, 424. Virtue neceſſary to the perfection of eloquence, 460. Deſcription of a true orator, 464. Qualifications for, 465. The beſt antient writers on oratory, 477. iii. 15. The uſe made of orations by the antient hiſtorians, 44. See *Eloquence.*

Oriental poetry, more characteriſtical of an age than of a country, iii. 93.

——— ſtyle of ſcripture language, i. 144.

Orlando Furioſo. See *Arioſto.*

Oſſian, inſtances of ſublimity in his works, i. 82. Correct metaphors, 387. Confuſed mixture of metaphorical and plain language in, 388. Fine apoſtrophe in, 425. Delicate ſimile, 434. Lively deſcriptions in, iii. 170.

Otway, his character as a tragic poet, iii. 352.

P

Pantomime, an entertainment of Roman origin, i. 139.

Parables, Eaſtern, their general vehicle for the conveyance of truth, iii. 192.

Paradiſe Loſt, critical review of that poem, iii. 283. The characters in, 286. Sublimity of, 288. Language and verſification, 289.

Parentheſes, cautions for the uſe of them, i. 281.

Paris, his character in the Iliad, examined, iii. 240.

Parliament of Great Britain, why eloquence has never been ſo powerful an inſtrument in, as in the antient popular aſſemblies of Greece and Rome, ii. 224.

Parnel, his character as a deſcriptive poet, iii. 163.

Particles, cautions for the uſe of them, i. 288. Ought never to cloſe ſentences, 305.

Paſſion, the ſource of oratory, ii. 177.

Paſſions, when and how to be addreſſed by orators, ii. 411. The orator muſt feel emotions before he can communicate them to others, 416. The language of, 418. Poets addreſs themſelves to the paſſions, iii. 85.

Paſtoral poetry, inquiry into its origin, iii. 114. A threefold view of paſtoral life, 117. Rules for paſtoral writing, 118. Its ſcenery, 120. Characters, 123. Subjects, 126. Comparative merits of antient paſtoral writers, 129. And of moderns, 130.

Pathetic, the proper management of, in a diſcourſe, ii. 410. Fine inſtance of, from Cicero, 420.

Pauſes, the due uſes of, in public ſpeaking, ii. 440. In poetry, 443. iii. 106.

Pericles, the firſt who brought eloquence to any degree of perfection, ii. 187. His general character, *ibid.*

Period. See *Sentence.*

Perſonification, the peculiar advantages of the Engliſh language in, i. 186. Limitations of gender in, 187. Objections againſt the practice of, anſwered, 407. The diſpoſition to animate the objects about us, natural to mankind, 408. This diſpoſition may account for the number of heathen divinities,

vinities, 409. Three degrees of this figure, 410. Rules for the management of the higheſt degree of, 419. Caution for the uſe of, in proſe compoſitions, 422. See *Apoſtrophe.*

Perſius, a character of his Satires, iii. 153.

Perſpicuity, eſſential to a good ſtyle, i. 233. Not merely a negative virtue, 235. The three qualities of, *ibid.*

Perſuaſion, diſtinguiſhed from conviction, ii. 174. Objection brought from the abuſe of this art, anſwered, 175. Rules for, 231.

Peruvians, their method of tranſmitting their thoughts to each other, i. 162.

Petronius Arbiter, his addreſs to the declaimers of his time, ii. 215.

Pharſalia. See *Lucan.*

Pherecydes of Scyros, the firſt proſe writer, i. 146.

Philips, character of his paſtorals, iii. 131.

Philoſophers, modern, their ſuperiority over the ancient, unqueſtionable, iii. 10.

Philoſophy, the proper ſtyle of writing adapted to, iii. 57. Proper embelliſhments for, 58.

Pictures, the firſt eſſay toward writing, i. 158.

Pindar, his character as a lyric poet, iii. 142.

Pitcairn, Dr. extravagant hyperbole cited from, i. 406.

Plato, character of his dialogues, iii. 63.

Plautus, his character as a dramatic poet, iii. 367.

Pleaders at the bar, inſtructions to, ii. 269. 392.

Pliny's Letters, general character of, iii. 69.

Plutarch, his character as a biographer, iii. 54.

Poetry, in what ſenſe deſcriptive, and in what imitative, i. 119. Is more ancient than proſe, 145. Source of the pleaſure we receive from the figurative ſtyle of, 416. Teſt of the merit of, 439. Whence the difficulty of reading poetry ariſes, ii. 443. Compared with oratory, 458. Epic, the ſtandards of, iii. 15. Definition of poetry, 85. Is addreſſed to the imagination and the paſſions, *ibid.* Its origin, 87. In what ſenſe older than proſe, *ibid.* Its union with muſic, 90. Antient hiſtory and inſtruction firſt conveyed in poetry, 91. Oriental, more characteriſtical of an age than of a country, 93. Gothic, Celtic, and Grecian, 94. Origin of the different kinds of, 96 Was more vigorous in its firſt rude eſſays than under refinement, 98. Was injured by the ſeparation of muſic from it, 99. Metrical feet, invention of, 102. Theſe meaſures not applicable to Engliſh poetry, 103. Engliſh heroic verſe, the ſtructure of, 105. French poetry, 106. Rhime and blank verſe compared, 108. Progreſs of Engliſh verſification, 112. Paſtorals, 114. Lyrics, 137. Didactic poetry, 146. Deſcriptive poetry, 158. Hebrew

poetry, 175. Epic poetry, 203. Poetic characters, two kinds of, 223. Dramatic poetry, 291.

Pointing, cannot correct a confuſed ſentence, i. 281.

Politics, the ſcience of, why ill underſtood among the antients, iii. 29.

Polybius, his character as an hiſtorian, iii. 23.

Pope, criticiſm on a paſſage in his Homer, i. 86. Proſe ſpecimen from, conſiſting of ſhort ſentences, 261. Other ſpecimens of his ſtyle, 297. 309. Confuſed mixtures of metaphorical and plain language in, 385. Mixed metaphor in, 390. Confuſed perſonification, 420. Inſtance of his fondneſs for antitheſes, 447. Character of his epiſtolary writings, iii. 71. Criticiſm on, 72. Conſtruction of his verſe, 107. Peculiar character of his verſification, 112. His paſtorals, 126. 131. His ethic epiſtles, 155. The merits of his various poems examined, 156. Character of his tranſlation of Homer, 244.

Preciſion in language, in what it conſiſts, i. 239. The importance of, *ibid.* 264. Requiſites to, 255.

Prepoſitions, whether more ancient than the declenſion of nouns by caſes, i. 190. Whether more uſeful and beautiful, 193. Dr. Campbell's obſervations on, 195. *note*. Their great uſe in ſpeech, 211.

Prior, allegory cited from, i. 396.

Pronouns, their uſe, varieties, and caſes, i. 196. Relative, inſtances illuſtrating the importance of their proper poſition in a ſentence, 268.

Pronunciation, diſtinctneſs of, neceſſary in public ſpeaking, ii. 434. Tones of, 446.

Proverbs, book of, a didactic poem, iii. 194.

Pſalm, xviii. ſublime repreſentation of the Deity in, i. 77. lxxxth, a fine allegory from, 396. Remarks on the poetic conſtruction of the Pſalms, ii. 179. 188.

Pulpit, the eloquence of defined, ii. 177. Engliſh and French ſermons compared, 221. The practice of reading ſermons in England diſadvantageous to oratory, 226. The art of perſuaſion reſigned to the puritans, *ibid.* Advantages and diſadvantages of pulpit-eloquence, 299. Rules for preaching, 303. The chief characteriſtics of pulpit eloquence, 306. Whether it is beſt to read ſermons, or deliver them extempore, 320. Pronunciation, 321. Remarks on French Sermons, 322. Cauſe of the dry argumentative ſtyle of Engliſh Sermons, 325. General obſervations, 329.

Pyſiſtratus, the firſt who cultivated the arts of ſpeech, ii. 187.

Q

Quinctilian, his ideas of taſte, i. 23. *note*. His account of the ancient diviſion of the ſeveral parts of ſpeech, 175. *note*. His

remarks on the importance of the ſtudy of grammar, 213. On perſpicuity of ſtyle, 233. 246. On climax, 301. On the ſtructure of ſentences, 307. Which ought not to offend the ear, 313. 328. His caution againſt too great an attention to harmony, 331. His caution againſt mixed metaphor, 387. His fine apoſtrophe on the death of his ſon, 426. His rule for the uſe of ſimiles, 440. His direction for the uſe of figures of ſtyle, ii. 5. His diſtinctions of ſtyle, 10. 28. His inſtructions for good writing, 51, 52. His character of Cicero's oratory, 206. His inſtructions to public ſpeakers for preſerving decorums, 243. His inſtructions to judicial pleaders, 271. His obſervations on exordiums to replies in debate, 383. On the proper diviſion of an oration, 387. His mode of addreſſing the paſſions, 417. His lively repreſentation of the effects of depravity, 462. Is the beſt ancient writer on oratory, 480.

R

Racine, his character as a tragic poet, iii. 345.

Ramſay, Allan, character of his *Gentle Shepherd*, iii. 136.

Rapin, P. remarks on his parallels between Greek and Roman writers, ii. 211.

Retz, cardinal de, character of his Memoirs, iii. 53.

Rhetoricians, Grecian, riſe and character of, ii. 189.

Rhyme, in Engliſh verſe, unfavourable to ſublimity, i. 85. And blank verſe compared, iii. 110. The former, why improper in the Greek and Latin languages, 111. The firſt introduction of couplets in Engliſh poetry, 112.

Richardſon, a character of his novels, iii. 82.

Ridicule, an inſtrument often miſapplied, iii. 356.

Robinſon Cruſoe, a character of that novel, iii. 82.

Romance, derivation of the term, iii. 78. See *Novels*.

Romans, derived their learning from Greece, ii. 201. Compariſon between them and the Greeks, 202. Hiſtorical view of their eloquence, 203. Oratorical character of Cicero, 204. Æra of the decline of eloquence among, 213.

Rouſſeau, Jean Baptiſte, his character as a lyric poet, iii. 145.

Rowe, his character as a tragic poet, iii. 352.

S

Salluſt, his character as an hiſtorian, iii. 31.

Sannazarius, his piſcatory eclogues, iii. 130.

Satan, examination of his character in Milton's Paradiſe Loſt, iii. 286.

Satire, poetical, general remarks on the ſtyle of, iii. 152.

Saxon language, how eſtabliſhed in England, i. 215.

Scenes, dramatic, what, and the proper conduct of, iii. 316.

Scriptures, ſacred, the figurative ſtyle of, remarked, i. 144.

The

The tranſlators of, happy in ſuiting their numbers to the ſubject, 336. Fine apoſtrophe in, 427. Preſent us with the moſt ancient monuments of poetry extant, iii. 175. The diverſity of ſtyle in the ſeveral books of, 176. The Pſalms of David, 170. No other writings abound with ſuch bold and animated figures, 184. Parables, 192. Bold and ſublime inſtances of perſonification in, *ibid.* Book of Proverbs, 194. Lamentations of Jeremiah, 195.

Scuderi, madam, her romances, iii. 80.

Seneca, his frequent antitheſes cenſured, i. 445. Character of his general ſtyle, ii. 16. ii. 59. His epiſtolary writings, 66.

Sentence in language, definition of, i. 258. Diſtinguiſhed into long and ſhort, 259. A variety in, to be ſtudied, 262. The properties eſſential to a perfect ſentence, 264. A principal rule for arranging the members of, 265. Poſition of adverbs, *ibid.* And relative pronouns, 268. Unity of a ſentence, rules for preſerving, 274. Pointing, 281. Parentheſes, *ibid.* Should always be brought to a perfect cloſe, 283. Strength, 285. Should be cleared of redundancies, 287. Due attention to particles recommended, 288. The omiſſion of particles ſometimes connects objects cloſer together, 293. Directions for placing the important words, 295. Climax, 300. A like order neceſſary to be obſerved in all aſſertions or propoſitions, 303. Sentences ought not to conclude with a feeble word, 304. Fundamental rule in the conſtruction of, 311. Sound not to be diſregarded, 313. Two circumſtances to be attended to for producing harmony in, 314. 325. Rules of the antient rhetoricians for this purpoſe, 317. Why harmony much leſs ſtudied now than formerly, 319. Engliſh words cannot be ſo exactly meaſured by metrical feet, as thoſe of Greek and Latin, 323. What is required for the muſical cloſe of a ſentence, 329. Unmeaning words introduced merely to round a ſentence, a great blemiſh, 330. Sounds ought to be adapted to ſenſe, 334.

Sermons, Engliſh, compared with French, ii. 221. Unity an indiſpenſable requiſite in, 308. The ſubject ought to be preciſe and particular, 309. The ſubject not to be exhauſted, 311. Cautions againſt dryneſs, 313. And againſt conforming to faſhionable modes of preaching, 315. Style, 316. Quaint expreſſions, 319. Whether beſt to be written or delivered extempore, 320. Delivery, 321. Remarks on French ſermons, 322. Cauſe of the dry argumentative ſtyle of Engliſh ſermons, 327. General obſervations, 329. Remarks on the proper diviſions of, 387. Concluſion, 425. Delivery, 428.

Sevigné, madam de, character of her Letters, iii. 73.

Shafteſbury, lord, obſervations on his ſtyle, i. 242. 262. 278. 297. 299. 333. 394. His general character as a writer, ii. 43.

Shakeſpeare, the merit of his plays examined, i. 50. Was not poſſeſſed of a refined taſte, 54. Inſtance of his improper uſe of metaphor, 382. 389. Exhibits paſſions in the language of nature, iii. 335. His character as a tragic poet, 349. As a comic poet, 373.

Shenſtone, his paſtoral ballad, iii. 133.

Shepherd, the proper character of, in paſtoral deſcription, iii. 124.

Sheridan, his diſtinction between ideas and emotions, ii. 447. *note.*

Sherlock, biſhop, fine inſtance of perſonification cited from his ſermons, i. 413. A happy alluſion cited from his ſermons, ii. 318. *note.*

Silius Italicus, his ſublime repreſentation of Hannibal, i. 68. *note.*

Simile, diſtinguiſhed from metaphor, i. 372. 431. Sources of the pleaſure they afford, *ibid.* Two kinds of, 432. Requiſites in, 435. Rules for, 438. Local propriety to be adhered to in, 441.

Simplicity, applied to ſtyle, different ſenſes of the term, ii. 33.

Smollet, improper uſe of figurative ſtyle, cited from, i. 380. *note.*

Solomon's Song, deſcriptive beauties of, iii. 168.

Songs, Runic, the origin of Gothic hiſtory, iii. 92.

Sophiſts of Greece, riſe and character of, ii. 189.

Sophocles, the plots of his tragedies remarkably ſimple, iii. 306. Excelled in the pathetic, 334. His character as a tragic poet, 340.

Sorrow, why the emotions of, excited by tragedy, communicate pleaſure, iii. 313.

Sounds, of an awful nature, affect us with ſublimity, i. 60. Influence of, in the formation of words, 129.

Speaker, public, muſt be directed more by his ear than by rules, i. 325.

Spectator, general character of that publication, ii. 59. Critical examination of thoſe Papers that treat of the pleaſures of imagination, 61.

Speech, the power of, the diſtinguiſhing privilege of mankind, i. 1. The grammatical diviſion of, into eight parts, not logical, 176. Of the antients, regulated by muſical rules, 320.

Strada, his character as an hiſtorian, iii. 49.

Style in language defined, i. 231. The difference of, in different countries, 282. The qualities of a good ſtyle, *ibid.* Perſpicuity, 33. Obſcurity, owing to indiſtinct conceptions,

tions, 234. Three requiſite qualities in perſpicuity, 235. Preciſion, 238. A looſe ſtyle, from what it proceeds, 240. Too great an attention to preciſion renders a ſtyle dry and barren, 256. French diſtinction of ſtyle, 260. The characters of, flow from peculiar modes of thinking, ii. 7. Different ſubjects require a different ſtyle, 8. Antient diſtinctions of, 10. The different kinds of, 11. Conciſe and diffuſive, on what occaſions proper, 12. Nervous and feeble, 17. A harſh ſtyle, from what it proceeds, 19. Æra of the formation of our preſent ſtyle, 20. Dry manner deſcribed, 22. A plain ſtyle, 23. Neat ſtyle, 26. Elegant ſtyle, 27. Florid ſtyle, 28. Natural ſtyle, 32. Different ſenſes of the term ſimplicity, 33. The Greek writers diſtinguiſhed for ſimplicity, 38. Vehement ſtyle, 47. General directions how to attain a good ſtyle, 51. Imitation dangerous, 55. Style not to be ſtudied to the neglect of thoughts, 57. Critical examination of thoſe papers in the Spectator that treat of the pleaſures of imagination, 61. Critical examination of a paſſage in Swift's writings, 145. General obſervations, 168. See *Eloquence*.

Sublimity of external objects, and ſublimity in writing, diſtinguiſhed, i. 58. Its impreſſions, 59. Of ſpace, 60. Of ſounds, *ibid.* Violence of the elements, 62. Solemnity bordering on the terrible, *ibid.* Obſcurity, not unfavourable to, 63. In buildings, 66. Heroiſm, 67. Great virtue, 68. Whether there is any one fundamental quality in the ſources of ſublime, 69.

Sublimity in writing defined, i. 73. Errors in Longinus pointed out, 74. The moſt antient writers afford the moſt ſtriking inſtances of ſublimity, 76. Sublime repreſentation of the Deity in Pſalm xviii. 77. And in the prophet Habakkuk, 78. In Moſes and Iſaiah, *ibid.* Inſtances of ſublimity in Homer, 79. In Oſſian, 82. Amplification injurious to ſublimity, 83. Rhyme in Engliſh verſe, unfavourable to, 85. Strength eſſential to ſublime writing, 88. A proper choice of circumſtances eſſential to ſublime deſcription, 90. Strictures on Virgil's deſcription of Mount Ætna, 91. The proper ſources of the ſublime, 93. Sublimity conſiſts in the thought, not in the words, 96. The faults oppoſed to the ſublime, 97.

Sully, duke de, character of his Memoirs, iii. 53.

Superſtition, ſublime repreſentation of its dominion over mankind, from Lucretius, i. 65. *note*.

Swift, obſervations on his ſtyle, i. 237. 255. 280. 308. 333. General character of his ſtyle, ii. 24. Critical examination of the beginning of his propoſal for correcting, &c. the Engliſh

Engliſh tongue, 145. Concluding obſervations, 168. His language, ii. 472. Character of his epiſtolary writing, iii. 71.

Syllables, Engliſh, cannot be ſo exactly meaſured by metrical feet, as thoſe of Greek and Latin, i. 324.

Synecdoche, in figurative ſtyle, explained, i. 370.

Synonymous words, obſervations on, i. 246.

T

Tacitus, character of his ſtyle, ii. 13. His character as an hiſtorian, 32. His happy manner of introducing incidental obſervations, 33. Inſtance of his ſucceſsful talent in hiſtorical painting, 43. His defects as a writer, 44.

Taſſo, a paſſage from his *Gieruſalemme* diſtinguiſhed by the harmony of numbers, i. 339. Strained ſentiments in his paſtorals, iii. 124. Character of his Aminta, 133. Critical examination of this poem, 266.

Taſte, true, the uſes of, in common life, i. 14. Definition of, 20. Is more or leſs common to all men, 21. Is an improvable faculty, 24. How to be refined, 26. Is aſſiſted by reaſon, 28. A good heart requiſite to a juſt taſte, 29. Delicacy and correctneſs the characters of perfect taſte, 30. Whether there be any ſtandard of taſte, 34. The diverſity of, in different men, no evidence of their taſtes being corrupted, 35. The teſt of, referred to the concurring voice of the poliſhed part of mankind, 41. Diſtinguiſhed from genius, 52. The ſources of pleaſure in, 55. The powers of, enlarge the ſphere of our pleaſures, 57. Imitation, as a ſource of pleaſure, 115. Muſic, 116. To what claſs the pleaſures received from eloquence, poetry, and fine writing are to be referred, *ibid.*

Telemachus. See *Fenelon*.

Temple, Sir William, obſervations on his ſtyle, i. 242. Specimens, 260. 278. 284. 290. 326. His general character as a writer, ii. 40.

Terence, beautiful inſtance of ſimplicity from, ii. 38. His character as a dramatic writer, iii. 368.

Terminations of words, the variations of, in the Greek and Latin languages, favourable to the libery of tranſpoſition, i. 154.

Theocritus, the earlieſt known writer of paſtorals, iii. 116. His talent in painting rural ſcenery, 120. Character of his paſtorals, 129.

Thomſon, fine paſſage from, where he animates all nature, i. 416. Character of his Seaſons, iii. 160. His elogium by Dr. Johnſon, 162. *note*.

INDEX.

Thuanus, his character as an hiſtorian, iii, 27.
Thucydides, his character as an hiſtorian, iii. 24. Was the firſt who introduced orations in hiſtorical narration, 45.
Tillotſon, archbiſhop, obſervations on his ſtyle, i. 242. 272. 326. 382. General character of, as a writer, ii. 39.
Tones, the due management of, in public ſpeaking, ii. 446.
Topics, among the antient rhetoricians, explained, ii. 399.
Tragedy, how diſtinguiſhed from comedy, iii, 291. More particular definition of, 292. Subject and conduct of, 295. Riſe and progreſs of, 297. The three dramatic unities, 304. Diviſion of the repreſentation into acts, 308. The cataſtrophe, 311. Why the ſorrow excited by tragedy communicates pleaſure, 313. The proper idea of ſcenes, and how to be conducted, 316. Characters, 323. Higher degrees of morality inculcated by modern than by antient tragedy, 327. Too great uſe made of the paſſion of love, on the modern ſtages, 328. All tragedies expected to be pathetic, 329. The proper uſe of moral reflections in, 335. The proper ſtyle and verſification of, 337. Brief view of the Greek ſtage, 339. French tragedy, 343. Engliſh tragedy, 348. Concluding obſervations, 353.
Tropes, a definition of, 347. Origin of, 352. The rhetorical diſtinctions among, frivolous, 366.
Turnus, the character of, not favourably treated in the Æneid, iii. 254.
Turpin, archbiſhop of Rheims, a romance writer, iii. 79.
Typographical figures of ſpeech, what, i. 451.

V

Vanbrugh, his character as a dramatic writer, iii. 377.
Verbs, their nature and office explained, i. 201. No ſentence complete without a verb expreſſed or implied, 202. The tenſes, 203. The advantage of Engliſh over the Latin, in the variety of tenſes, 204. Active and paſſive, 206. Are the moſt artificial and complex of all the parts of ſpeech, *ibid.*
Verſe, blank, more favourable to ſublimity than rhyme, i. 86. Inſtructions for the reading of, ii. 443. Conſtruction of, iii. 108.
Virgil, inſtances of ſublimity in, i. 63. 89. 91. Of harmony, 339. 342. Simplicity of language, 350. Figurative language, 368. 411. 425. Specimens of his paſtoral deſcriptions, iii. 118. *note.* 125. Character of his paſtorals, 129. His Georgics, a perfect model of didactic poetry, 148. The principal beauties in the Georgics, 150. Beautiful deſcriptions in his Æneid, 169. Critical examination of that poem, iii. 249. Compared with Homer, 257.

Virtue, high degrees of, a ſource of the ſublime, i. 68. A neceſſary ingredient to form an eloquent orator, ii. 460.

Viſion, the figure of ſpeech ſo termed, in what it conſiſts, i. 452.

Unities, dramatic, the advantages of adhering to, iii. 304. Why the moderns are leſs reſtricted to the unities of time and place than the antients, 318.

Voice, the powers of, to be ſtudied in public ſpeaking, ii. 432.

Voiture, character of his epiſtolary writings, iii. 73.

Voltaire, his character as an hiſtorian, iii. 56. Critical examination of his Henriade, 279. His argument for the uſe of rhyme in dramatic compoſitions, 338. His character as a tragic poet, 347.

Voſſius, Joannes Gerardus, character of his writings on eloquence, ii. 477.

W

Waller, the firſt Engliſh poet who brought couplets into vogue, iii. 112.

Wit is to be very ſparingly uſed at the bar, ii. 277.

Words, obſolete, and new coined, incongruous with purity of ſtyle, i. 236. Bad conſequences of their being ill-choſen, 238. Obſervations on thoſe termed ſynonymous, 246. Conſidered with reference to ſound, 315.

Words and things, inſtances of the analogy between, i. 130.

Writers of Genius, why they have been more numerous in one age than in another, iii. 3. Four happy ages of, pointed out, *ibid.*

Writing, two kinds of, diſtinguiſhed, i. 158. Pictures the firſt eſſay in, *ibid.* Hieroglyphics the ſecond, 159. Chineſe characters, 163. Arithmetical figures, 164. The conſiderations which led to the invention of an alphabet, 165. Cadmus's alphabet, the origin of that now uſed, 168. Hiſtorical account of the materials uſed to receive writing, 170. General remarks, 171. See *Grammar*.

Y

Young, Dr. his poetical character, i. 394. Too fond of antitheſes, 446. The merit of his works examined, iii. 157. His character as a tragic poet, 353.

THE END.

8 JY 69